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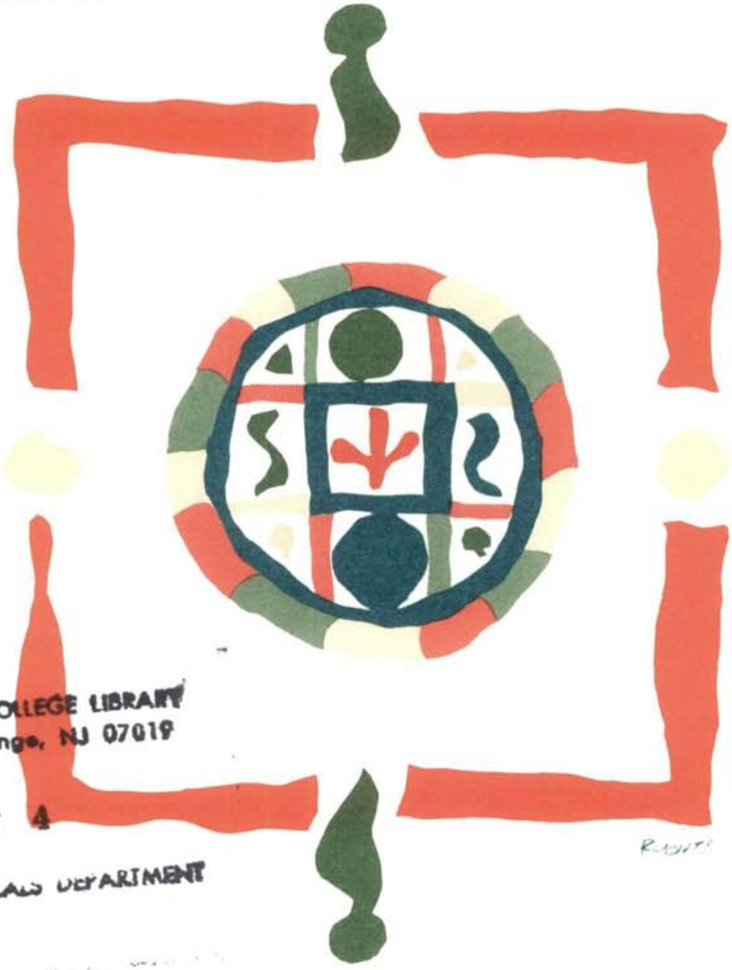

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Another India

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Preface to the Issue "Another India"

INDIA, LIKE THE PREPONDERANT NUMBER of the more than one hundred and sixty states that comprise international society today, is a new nation, created after World War II, the political invention of a generation committed to the extinction of an earlier colonial domination. Memories of these years of struggle, following on decades of intense agitation, remain vivid, even for the vast majority born since the time of Independence, who can have no personal recollection of either the Raj or of the early years of the republic. The people of India, in common with many others, share the characteristic late-twentieth-century myth of nation building, a tale of heroism and sacrifice, compelling in its simple narrative, powerful in its complex symbolism.

Four decades having passed since these events, there is today another kind of history, even more contemporary, but also considerably more controversial; it has to do with what India has achieved in this period both economically and politically. In common with certain other of the new states, today generally denominated as "developing societies," India has a record of accomplishment that some find inspiring, others disheartening. If the indices of growth in some areas are encouraging, exceeding by far the expectations of the "founding fathers," the evidences of decay (it is best to avoid the more incendiary term *decline*) are disconcerting.

Grinding rural and urban poverty, and a population explosion that shows few signs of abating, have become the standard Western mass-media representations of contemporary Indian society. However incomplete such portrayals of chronic and perpetual disorder may be, however neglectful they are of other traits in contemporary Indian life, such descriptions are not compensated for by the assertion that India is a very modern nation, noted for its advanced science and technology, with a skilled and influential middle class, more numerous, some would say, than that of even the largest of the member states of the European Economic Community. Such gross statistics, however beguiling, are unconvincing, meaningless; they tell little of the dynamics of a society that is both advanced and backward, poor and rich, democratic in a hundred ways, authoritarian and corrupt in an idiom itself characteristically Indian. It is India's distinctiveness that is so rarely acknowledged by those who choose to see it as just one more of the world's new and developing societies, larger than most, but not by that fact alone fundamentally different.

Yet, India is different; it puts one in mind of no other twentieth-century society, which is not to argue that it is better, more exotic, or exceptional. If this issue of *Dædalus* has been entitled "Another India," its meaning ought to be explicitly stated. It is impossible to contemplate contemporary India without giving attention to its modernity, its parliamentary institutions, political parties, and free press, even if none of these does much to eradicate its seemingly endemic poverty, as pervasive in the countryside as in the cities, or substantially diminishes the violence that seems always to threaten. Behind a set of institutions and attributes that are familiar in the contemporary world, it is easy to make too much of the sights and sounds of India that are indeed different, that give it certain of its distinctive qualities. These, however, are insignificant beside the complex institutions, so different from what is common elsewhere that many outside India choose to ignore them. It is much easier to use the universal calculus of the principal international economic agencies and of governments throughout the world, which give attention primarily to gross national product, rates of growth, and the like than to weigh other supposed ephemera.

The economic indices are indeed significant, but if we pay attention only to them, we risk perpetuating the habits of the immediate post–World War II era, which saw modernization as the only possible contemporary panacea, expected to achieve in time a breaking of every "cake of custom," demonstrating once and for all the fragility of all earlier convention and tradition. We lose much if we underestimate the continuing vitality and importance of the major religious, linguistic, ethnic, and regional differences, which are so important in defining contemporary India. These, the residual features of a so-called traditional society, were expected to find their way into the ash heap of history. Not the least of the surprises of recent decades has been the rapid obsolescence of that simplistic view.

To study India without reference to the distinctive features of individual, family, and communal life that survive in that society—altered but in no sense obliterated by modernity—is to miss what is most distinctive in India today, what makes it so volatile and unpredictable. Despite its science and skyscrapers, its civilian and military technology, India is not just one more traditional society becoming what others in both the West and the East have become. The proposition that progress toward a certain kind of modernity may no longer be in prospect, that it may never come to pass, is disconcerting to those who cannot imagine any other scenario. Yet, a perusal of the pages of this issue of *Dædalus* can only suggest that some such possibility exists. If there is a single concealed message in these pages of *Dædalus*, it is that India has embarked on a road that is in certain respects very much its own, resembling, inevitably, certain roads also taken by others but having a number of quite unique features. The power of the Indian state, which is incontestable, is amply documented in this volume, but it may not be sufficient to change a whole society of such diverse regions and peoples with so many disparate religions, customs, traditions, and beliefs, many of which appear to have lost little of their authority or vitality.

This issue may be read on one level as a study of contemporary Indian culture. It is not an accident that prose, poetry, theater, film, art, and architecture figure as conspicuously as they do. Still, it would be a serious mistake to imagine that our purpose has been to provide a conspectus—a manual of sorts—on the Indian arts today. If we have used these extensively, it is because they provide a convenient way to allow many Indian voices to be heard, to suggest something of the cacophony characteristic of the nation today. Rates of illiteracy are significant in one dimension; the fact that even the best educated know the languages of only a minority of the vast populations of India is important in another. So, also, the relations of mothers and their children—so fundamentally different from anything common today in the West—may seem like a subordinate theme; given the character of this study, however, it is primary.

Why? Because the modernity of India can only be represented in a study that takes account also of all that is primordial in that society, that has not simply given way before the power of modern technology. India is not a museum, parts of which contain traditional culture—the artifacts of another age—with the rest being contemporary, a version of what we find in London or New York. It is impossible to understand the Indian enterprise today, in its political, social, or economic dimensions, without giving attention to how traditional India survives, transformed but not obliterated by the events of the twentieth century. Indian politics are incomprehensible to those who neglect to pay attention to Indian religion; they are no more meaningful to those who choose to ignore the pervasive significance of the land, the role of the family, the particular meanings that attach to the word *community*.

A great debt is owed the Ford Foundation, whose generous grant made the planning of this issue possible. Without the help of the Ford Foundation offices in New Delhi, and the cooperation of Dr. Lincoln Chen, R. Sudarshan, and S. Chellani, the planning process would almost certainly have foundered. I feel deep gratitude toward each of them. Also, thanks need to be expressed to those who are not authors, who consented to help plan the issue, who met in Cochin. The decision of the Smithsonian Institution to assist in covering certain essential travel costs, through the Smithsonian Special Foreign Currency Program, under the direction of Francine Berkowitz, proved invaluable, both in making possible a conference in India and in bringing the Indian authors to the House of the Academy in Cambridge. For help in making this an attractive issue, illustrated and designed in ways that few other issues of *Dædalus* are, I would express my thanks to the Center for International Contemporary Arts in New York and to its chairman, E. Alkazi, and its executive director, Bhupendra Karia. David Finn and Ulrich Ruchti, of Ruder and Finn, who have helped in the past, have come forward to help again. I greatly appreciate what they have done for us.

S.R.G.

The Political Culture of the Indian State

Ashis Nandy

The Indian polity as it was conceived forty years ago has been redefined by recent history: the state has come to dominate, not serve, civil society. As the state grew, the focus of national politics also shifted, from Parliament, with its dialogue between governments and parties, to the media. In this new forum, in the slick monologues of advertisements, political personalities, not party platforms, are marketed for public consumption. One victim of this new political culture is democracy itself. While democracy remains the ideal of the Indian masses, to sectors of the nation's elite it has become suspect; they fear it threatens to disrupt the management of the future.

The most prominent feature of the Indian political culture in recent years has been the emergence of the nation-state as the hegemonic actor in the public realm. The nation-state has been an important actor in the Indian political scene during the last four decades, but it has shared the stage with a number of political forces. Now, for the first time, the nation-state has moved center stage and has hardly any competition from the other actors in the public realm. From arbitration in matters of art and literature to the correction of Indian shortcomings in sports, virtually every sphere of life is now under the jurisdiction of the Indian state.[1]

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Generations of Indians exposed to the colonial culture and brought up on Western knowledge systems have waited for the day when a powerful Indian state would belong to them, be an exemplar and a social arbiter, protect them from their non-Indian tormenters, and play the central role in transforming the society. Yet, now that that golden day has arrived, one hears little applause. Instead, Indians seem split in their opinions.

First, there are those brought up under the colonial dispensation who cannot believe their eyes when they encounter a formidable nation-state. They continue to see India as a small, besieged, newly independent nation buffeted by internal stresses and external conspiracies. To them, India has no control over her own destiny as yet, for such control would require an even stronger nation-state, backed by even greater armed strength, and an even larger urban-industrial base.

There are other Indians who, though aware of the new power of the Indian state, have no conceptual frame in which to fit that awareness. They see power seeping out through the fingers of citizens and being concentrated in a state apparatus wedded to giganticism and bureaucratic centralism. They want to believe that internal reforms of the Indian state will one day remedy this situation. Brought up on the nineteenth-century European dream of capturing state power, either through a revolution or the ballot box, they see the modern nation-state as part of a universal sociology of politics, the career line of which in India has been distorted by local social and cultural influences. Once the distortions are taken care of, they say, the state will begin to represent the true interests of a majority of Indian citizens, distributing the accessories of the good life all around.

Finally, there is a small number of Indians—mostly representing some vestigial forms of Gandhism and post-Maoist Marxism, and the rest being activists and scholars with no clear ideological position—who are trying to interpret the burgeoning peasant movements and the self-affirmation of a variety of minorities, from the tribals to the landless laborers to the untouchables. This small group of people has begun to think that the problem with the Indian nation-state is not its failure but its success and that they are now dealing with a state which represents an exaggerated and partly pathological extension of the normal anxieties of a postcolonial society. In terms of the task of state formation that it set before itself at the time of

Independence, India, they believe, has made it, and the more pressing political problems the country now faces they attribute not to the faulty implementation of a great vision but to the attempts to realize a vision, which however reasonable at one time, has in recent years become inadequate.

Where did the dream of the Indian nation-state begin to go sour? The answer, to the extent that any is possible, lies not in the history of the Indian state—precolonial, colonial, or postcolonial. It lies in the changing idea and/or mythology of the Indian state and the diminishing ability of the modernist vision to mobilize the enthusiasm of the 1950s and 1960s. It was after all within the vision of those times that the now-dominant mythology of the Indian nation-state was born.

TRADITIONAL STATE VERSUS NATION-STATE

The precolonial Indian state, defying the classical treatises on the subject, was never an empirical reality derived from theoretical postulates. No such applied political theory could have worked in such a highly diverse civilization not blessed with an authoritative cultural center. A culturally well-defined, internally consistent concept of the state in India could survive only as an experience in *ex post facto* theoretical reconstruction, mainly in textbooks.[2]

The traditional idea of the state in India, contrary to popular belief, grew the hard way—from attempts to give theoretical meaning to the idea and to impose a normative order on unavoidable empirical realities. The traditional idea of the state was a *post facto* justification of a slowly emerging political order built on existing political practices. The idea was often an overarching construction that retrospectively coped with the heterogeneity and contradictions inherent in Indian politics. It was a projection of, and a means of dealing with, a chaotic political reality.

This, however, was not the same concept of state advocated by the first generation of post-Independence Indian leaders. Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhbhai Patel, and Babasaheb Ambedkar—who among themselves did so much to give an institutional basis to the presently dominant idea of the state in India—may have differed ideologically, but they all opted for a concept of the state that was only a minor variation of the post-seventeenth-century European concept of the nation-state. All three rejected some of the major articulations of the concept of the state during the pre-Gandhian and Gandhian phases of the nationalist movement, especially the articulations based on pre-British experiences and experiments. The post-Independence elites borrowed their concept of the state "rationally," on supra-political grounds, from the concept of the state dominant in the politically "developed" societies. These elites were fully committed to the idea of the nation-state as it had grown over the previous three hundred years in the West, since the Treaty of Westphalia, particularly since the British and French had established their global hegemony in the nineteenth century, and Bismarck had created a proper nation-state in Germany. Not that the elites were unaware of some of the problems associated with this idea of the state. But they handled them by developing a slightly unorthodox idea of the nation-state—as a temporary compromise with the unhappy, primitive diversity of India, which over time they expected to disappear so that a modern nation-state in its pristine purity would emerge.[3]

This compromise—built on, some may say, the typical Hindu genius for hypocrisy—managed to marginalize the traditional approach to the state, as the approach was operationalized by India's precolonial rulers facing the country's mind-boggling amorphousness and diversity. The post-Independence elites tried to function with an imported concept of statecraft, legitimated in terms of the traditions of India's high culture and adjusted to suit the country's needs, as the elites read those needs.

Two expectations grew as by-products of this process of adaptation. Both had to do with the concept of the ideal society—that is, a society suited to the modern nation-state system—implicit in the new ideology of the Indian state. The first expectation was that, with modernization, a more coherent form of Indianness would emerge and the diversity of the country would diminish, to make India more governable. The second was that, over time, the compromised form of the nation-state would give way to a nation-state working according to the universal principles of statecraft and able to persuade, mobilize, or coerce the society to adjust to the state's ideology.

These expectations were written not only into the formal ideology of the state but also into the systems of political socialization and education the Indians evolved and built into the urban and semi-urban middle-class culture of politics, the latter deeply influenced by

India's colonial state system, on the one hand, and by awe of Europe's achievements in statecraft, on the other. This influence explains the full support that the concept of the nation-state received from quarters that might have been expected to be ambivalent toward the concept—those upholding the causes of the various religious and ethnic groups, especially the Hindu revivalists. The latter, for instance, did not plead for an indigenous Hindu concept of the state, except when they were extrapolating into India's past the modern concept of the state. Being the illegitimate offspring of the Raj, they wanted to do to the non-Hindu minorities and to the West what they believed the West had done to the non-West and to the minorities and the weaker sections of the West itself. As the moving, if somewhat pathetic, last testament of Gandhi's assassin made clear, they wanted a Bismarckian Prussian state in India and held the aging Gandhi responsible for sabotaging the project through his superstitious dependence on ideas like soul force, fasting, and nonviolence.

The modern concept of the nation-state has now begun to dominate the public realm. Not only have the last forty years created enormous vested interest in the concept, but almost the whole of modern India has come to see the nation-state as the only valid, possible concept of the state, as an institution that should have absolute priority over all other aspects of Indian civilization. The nation-state has acquired enough clout to resist all demands of Indian society that clash with the needs of the state. The society is now required, in every instance, to adjust to the state.

This reversal of relationship has concretized the idea of the state. The state now has greater empirical presence and more historical content. The idea of the state with which Indians worked after Independence had a mythic quality about it. The classical Indian state and the state in India's epic traditions had survived mainly in the minds of men, not in historic reality. The concept of the perfect Indian polity, as it supposedly existed before outsiders spoiled it, has always been the bugbear of hard-eyed native historians. However, a case can be made that the mythical nature of this perfect past was as obvious to the sly, devious natives as the Chinese concept of an ancient golden age was obvious to the hard-boiled Chinese peasants. True, the ideal Indian state, like any other mythic structure, could arouse passion and allegiance, but they were of a different kind. The Indians talked with reverence of Ramarajya, literally the kingdom of

Lord Rama but also a moral polity. It is doubtful, however, that they expected it to be realized. In an epic culture, the idea of Ramarajya bridged the sacred and the profane, the transcendental and the everyday, what was and what could never be. The idea was a means of criticizing the present rather than an attainable blueprint for the future.

Some of the historic states, too, were mythologized in the popular culture. But for the historically minded, the states of Chandragupta Maurya, Ashoka, and Akbar had little to do with what the historians tell us about them. They had more to do with the political awareness shaped by the nationalist movement, with trying to discover in the past a baseline for social criticism in the present. If I am allowed the use of my own cliché, India's past has been traditionally open-ended; her present and future are open mainly to the extent they are seen to follow from her past.

Today, the Indian nation-state resides less and less in the minds of men; it is primarily what the Indians confront on the ground. The vagueness, chaos, deliberate obfuscation, and inability to close up definitions or mark out conceptual boundaries—which so enrage the tough-minded political analysts in India—are now giving way to the sharp operational definitions that the moderns relish. The range of options once available within the Indian political culture has begun to narrow.

Take a simple example. Gandhi—the real one, not his namesakes—pleaded for Hindustani as the national language of India. One can insist that Hindustani is nothing more than the lowest common denominator of a large number of Indian languages, mainly Hindi and Urdu. One can organize a first-class, unending debate on whether Hindustani is bazaar Hindi or bazaar Urdu, whether it has a literature or not, whether it can be written better in Devanagari or in Arabic script, whether certain Indian languages are closer to Hindustani, to Hindi, or to Urdu, and whether Hindustani is a language at all or just a humble dialect. Hindustani is everybody's language and yet nobody's. Few passionately love it; fewer hate it.

This situation gives rise to a play in language politics that Hindi cannot give. Hindi is more clearly defined; it has a literature identifiably different from the Urdu literature (though it was not so at one time); it has forms that immediately allow one to locate the speaker in a social hierarchy. As with English, if you speak bad Hindi in a certain way, you can still be located above someone who speaks good Hindi in another way. Like English again, Hindi allows certain communities to gain political and economic advantages through language skills, and it creates the basis for a community that can be politically mobilized ("Hindi heartland" and "cow belt" are now well-known terms in the political geography of India). Hindustani is the language of a plurality of Indians in one way; Hindi is the language of a plurality of Indians in another.

I use this example not to initiate a debate on India's national or official language. Much can be said about why Hindi was ultimately chosen, not Hindustani, and the politics of that choice. Even Hindi, when it was chosen, was seen by many as a confederation of languages having blurred sociopolitical and geographical outlines. I use this example to mark out a political consciousness that was once central to India's political culture but that has become increasingly marginalized. It is the consciousness that prompted India's constitution makers not merely to avoid using the expression "national language" but to declare all the major regional languages, including Hindi and English, official languages. If the Indians were writing the Constitution today, they would do what they often inadvertently say: they would declare Hindi the national language, English an additional official language, the other major Indian languages regional languages, and the rest dialects or local languages.

The former approach is congruent with the traditional Indian idiom of political pluralism, the latter with the idiom of the nation-state system and its preferred mode of aggregating interests and subnational cultures. The former defines and justifies the center in terms of the peripheries; the latter defines and justifies the peripheries in terms of the center. The former cannot conceive of the center without the peripheries and values the center mainly as a construction based on the peripheries. The latter cannot conceive of the peripheries without the center, because the peripheries are valued mainly as the extensions, instruments, and constituents of the center. The former takes the autonomy and dignity of the peripheries as axiomatic and sacrosanct. The latter takes a more imperial and instrumental approach toward the peripheries and views the center as the ultimate repository of the principle of the civilization.

The choice of official language also hints at another kind of change taking place in the political culture of Indian politics—in the relationship between the classical and the folk and between the "high" and the "low" within each tradition coming into contact with the modern state. There is something in the nation-state system that pushes it to split a culture into its high and its low components, to glorify the former and devalue the latter. High culture is usually more sharply defined and stable than the low, and cuts across a large number of regional cultures and helps aggregate them for policy purposes. High culture is also primarily the culture of the elites, with whom a functioning state has to establish at least a quid pro quo.* When a high culture homogenizes a community's life-style, it has the advantage of not seeming a great calamity to the community, for usually the classical enjoys a higher status in a society.

Thus, the Indian nation-state, like most other nation-states in the Southern world, has been constantly trying to promote classical culture as the core of its identity and to establish a political understanding with that culture. On the other hand, the Indian nation-state has become increasingly dismissive toward culture as it is lived, as opposed to culture that can be museumized or put on the stage or into a reservation. When development experts and social workers speak of the obstinacy and the unwillingness to learn of the Indian, they often have in mind the philosophy and culture of everyday life and the skepticism of the Indian peasant toward modern medicine, agronomy, forestry, and so on. When these professional well-wishers speak of the catholicity of the Indian, they usually have in mind the high culture—the *shruti* texts, some of the Upanishads and Vedanta, and the less obstreperous Brahminic sectors that are willing to legitimize the new and powerful.

The main point, I hope, is clear. The culture of Indian politics has in recent years depended more and more on a mix of Indian high culture and the metropolitan culture of the nation-state. The traditional dialectic of the Brahminic and the non-Brahminic, the classical and the folk, the textually prescribed and the customary practice has been bypassed. Indian political culture is moving away from the pluralism that the culture of the Indian state was conceptually derived

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*It is an indicator of the complexity of Indian culture that even this formulation has important exceptions, such as the northern Indian classical music and dance, which are associated with low status in some Muslim communities or with the ambiguous status of the *devadasis* in some Hindu communities.

from and legitimized by a variety of political cultures or ways of life. The new culture of the state has come to depend more and more on the expanding pan-Indian, urban, middle-class culture, serving as an emerging mass culture. This mass culture is not the central tendency of the diverse popular cultures of the different regions of India but an identifiable, well-bounded culture like that of an American-style melting pot.

THE IDEOLOGY OF THE NATION-STATE AND NATIONALISM

The shift from the older culture of pluralism to the pluralism of the melting pot has been accompanied by four changes in the relationship between the state and the society. None of the changes is unique to India and it is possible to see them as unavoidable in a multiethnic, diverse, Third World society. It is even possible to make a case that these changes have begun to push India into the mold of a normal Third World polity, facing all the usual problems of such a polity. In other words, it is the changing relationship between the state and the society that is standardizing India as a proper Third World country, not her poverty or low urban-industrial growth.

Changes in Relationship between State and Society

One change is the growing tendency of the Indian elites to identify the development of the state with development in general. Not only does the Indian state hegemonize all social resources; it eats up an increasing proportion of the resources. If one takes into account all the state's expenditures on itself, it can be said to have successfully cornered all conventional targets of development; it primarily develops itself. Even when the state invests in conventional development, say in primary health care in rural areas, the lion's share of investment goes to the various wings of the state, to administration and state-employed professional services, to the establishment of state-owned pharmaceutical factories, to "nationalized" medical education and public health research, and to the health-planning process itself.

In addition, much of India's most spectacular achievements in recent years have been in defense and defense-related technologies and manpower. These achievements are seen by the Indian elites not as deviations from development but as intrinsic to it. As the country's internal problems fail to justify further strengthening of the coercive power of the state, such justifications are sought in the perceived hostility to India of—alas—all her neighbors. The presumption is that the empowerment of the Indian nation-state automatically and by itself ensures the survival of India.

A second change is a growing tendency to identify the secular-rational processes of the state with the tolerance of ethnic and cultural diversity. The tendency has already made the strengthening of the Indian state the index, for modern Indians, of the integration of the minority cultures into the national mainstream and the management of ethnic conflicts by flattening diversities. Not only are Indians becoming more dependent on the state to ensure ethnic tolerance, but virtually every ethnic conflict or interreligious feud is now taken to the state for arbitration. Yet, given that a modern state tends to be wary of all forms of ethnicity, more so if they seem unable to cope with the state's demands, such arbitration has ceased to be impartial. All too frequently, the ruling party, the opposition, the police, the bureaucracy, and to an extent the judiciary get involved in ethnic violence as partisans, a hazard common to states the world over. These factions also, reluctantly but surely, try to take political advantage of such involvement.[4]

A third change is that the state has established close, inviolable links with megascience and megatechnology—not only because it must depend on modern science and technology to give teeth to its coercive apparatus, but also because it can use the achievements in these sectors, especially when they are spectacular, to legitimize itself as a repository of scientific knowledge and a negation of native irrationalities.

The scientific temperament as an ideal (which has spawned a mass of officially sponsored statements, exhibitions, and associations) is central to this link between knowledge and power. The idea originated both in the theory of the white man's burden and in the ideologies of the nineteenth-century reform movements, religious as well as secular. Rammohun Roy, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, Swami Vivekananda, and Syed Ahmed Khan are examples of social thinkers and reformers who thought that the Western scientific tradition would enliven or reactivate the indigenous cultures in the subcontinent and ensure their survival in the contemporary world. In the context of Europe's "successful" use of the culture of scientific rationality, Indian society to these thinkers seemed mired in tradition—superstitious, stagnant, and apolitical.

Now this civilizational difference has been internalized and the same discourse elegantly adapted for use against the old India.[5] In the process, the principles of the scientific temperament and cultural evolution have become two-pronged weapons. They prompt a constant search for grand technological and organizational feats as evidence of the cultural superiority of the new elites, and a search for spectacular examples of the decadence or retrogression and irrationality of everyday life as evidence of the cultural inferiority of nonmodern India. Once again, what was diversity has become a scaled-down homogeneity, in which the entire society is seen walking, slightly out of breath, the inclined plane of history, with a large part of it trailing behind an "enlightened," self-confident minority.

Consequences of Change

Two major political-cultural consequences have resulted from these changes. First, there is growing impatience with politics and the democratic process in some sections of modern India. These sections have not given up on democracy, but they believe it has gone too far and empowered the irrational and atavistic elements in the society. One aspect of this impatience is to constantly search for technological and managerial fixes to bypass politics. This search has thrown into relief the stronger faith of the lower rungs of Indian society in democratic institutions and electoral politics.

The discomfort with competitive mass politics that parts of India's traditional social elites have demonstrated can be explained by their decline in social dominance, brought about by electoral politics. The process started in the 1930s; electoral politics after Independence hastened it. This part of the story is well known. What is less known is the spread of this unease in modern India in recent years. On the one side are the new urban elites—the professionals, the media experts, the scientists, and the new generation of industrialists who have internalized the nineteenth-century British elite's fear that democracy itself might begin to threaten freedom and rationality if those with specialized, up-to-date knowledge are not allowed to have direct access to power, bypassing the democratic process. On the other side are the right and left radicalisms of various hues, led mainly by individuals from India's modernizing elites, who, displaced from the political center by mass politics, are trying to reenter the political stage, this time as expert well-wishers of the people.

A second consequence is that Indian nationalism has begun to adjust to these changes. The nationalism that the Indian freedom movement left behind was a political as well as a powerful intellectual and cultural critique of the modern West.

This critique, derived from the syncretism of the Indic civilization, was an attempt to cope with and understand the West in terms of native as well as Western categories. The categories came from diverse sources—from Western rationalism (many Indians found the West deficient in Western terms), from socialist and liberal thought (which offered partial critiques of modernity), from Indian traditions and the specialist carriers of traditions (who found the Western enterprise immoral, ethnocidal, and philosophically unacceptable), and, above all, from Gandhi and his followers (who sought a traditional basis for culture with an updated sense of evil so as to criticize not only the West but also certain aspects of Indian traditions).

Such a nationalism had to include a critique of Western nationalism, and some pre-Independence Indian thinkers did provide the outlines of such a critique. What many Indian and Western observers found unacceptably wishy-washy in Indian nationalism was its rejection of the hard-eyed interest- and realpolitik-based nationalism. The Indian freedom movement ventured a low-key, amorphous, tolerant, peculiarly consensual nationalism which was a constant criticism of the steam-rolling, "mature" nationalism so adored by many Westernized Indians.

A good example of the spirit of this nationalism is that India has two *de facto* national anthems: Rabindranath Tagore's "Jana Gana Mana" and Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay's "Bande Mataram." Both are in Bengali. (The Urdu song "Sare Jahan Se Achcha," by Muhammad Iqbal, the cultural hero of Pakistan, comes close to being the third.) India is unique in having neither of its national anthems in the national language.

This multiplicity of anthems reflects a nationalism that refuses to be fully defined. "Jana Gana Mana," despite being the national anthem of a postcolonial society, is one of the least nationalist anthems in the world. It celebrates an open-ended, nonchauvinist concept of Indian civilization. "Bande Mataram" is only partially an invocation to Mother India; it is also an invocation to Mother Earth.

It is an indicator of the changing mood in India that recent attempts have been again made, after a gap of nearly forty years, to discredit "Jana Gana Mana" by alleging that it was originally a paean to George V, the British sovereign. Obviously, it is not an anthem the tough-minded Indian neonationalists are enthusiastic about. Some of them, seeking to make up for what the anthem lacks in toughness, have tried to make the singing of it compulsory. Only a few have seen these attempts as assaults on the spirit of the anthem.[6]

While the idea of nationalism as a universal concept, with a universal content, takes hold of the Indian mind, more and more Indians seem to be losing confidence in their own version of patriotism and in their own concepts of state, governance, and integration. The urban middle-class Indians, the ones with most exposure to the mass media and easy access to contemporary political ideas, now believe that those who do not follow the standard definition of nationalism are doomed to be dominated and marginalized in international affairs. These Indians are willing to depend on the nation-state to forge national unity and to shed the slogans of the earlier generations of political elites—such as "unity in diversity" and "coexistence"—as effete clichés.

On the Indian middle classes there has always been a fringe yearning for a nation-state with one religion, one language, and one culture, for that was what the Western societies seemingly had. But the mainstream of the freedom movement resisted the model, partly out of the need to mobilize a highly diverse society for political purposes, partly out of a commitment to the Indian civilization, seen as dependent on this diversity for its survival, and partly out of a concern with the fate of the civil society in a country in which everybody at some plane was in a minority. That resistance is now weakening.

All said, the nationalism independent India inherited was based on the idea of confederation. India was unwilling to sacrifice the interests of its citizens for the sake of an idea shared only by the country's modernizing elites. That meaning of nationalism is now changing. There is now a sizable number of Indians whom the new nationalists would love to call the true Indians. They are the modern Indians with a pan-Indian consciousness, fully committed to the culture of the nation-state, uprooted from small local cultures but having some access to the Indian high culture. These "true" Indians have introduced to the political scene a brand new concept of Indianness which is not so much a statistical central tendency or a self-consciously chosen artifact as an empirical reality.

The problems of national integration and ethnic violence in India have much to do with the distinction between the two forms of nationalism and the gradual loss of status of the indigenous form. National integration in India is now less often negatively defined; it less often means the survival of all Indians in their own ways of life and a suspicion of the textbook concept of the nation-state. Nor does it allow much space for the various Indian concepts of a civil society or for the real-life Indians speaking in thousands of voices.

THE IRON LAW OF INDIAN POLITICS

One consequence of the growth of a pan-Indian middle-class consciousness, a homogenizing nationalism, and a centralizing nation-state is the emergence of a political culture suited to a presidential system and the emergence of a cycle in electoral politics. Both have been underwritten by the fact that, though the form of the Westminster model survives, the substance is now popularity-contest-like referenda, hitched to an American-style elective monarchy, with many of the major political parties reduced to being electoral machines.

The most distinctive part of the story is the cycle. As a part of it, victories in national elections tend to be decisive; the electoral support base of the victorious tend to shrink halfway through the term, and either the opposition or a part of the ruling coalition, in the garb of the opposition or a mixture of the two, captures power in national elections to begin the cycle all over again. In all this, the media, the volatile middle-class public opinion, and the fledgling mass culture play crucial roles.

Thus, every regime comes to power with a flourish, arousing high expectations and enthusiasm all around. In the first half of its term, it looks invulnerable, gets good press, and enjoys the confidence of the intelligentsia and the urban middle classes. During this period, almost all criticisms of the regime seem unsupported, ill-bred, and even paranoiac. Halfway through the term, the expectations catch up with the regime and the walk downhill begins. In the second half, any support given to the regime looks dishonest or self-interested, and no amount of populism and media management makes it look convincing. Most thinking Indians spend the second half of the term worrying about what a desperate regime may do and about the long-term fate of Indian democracy.

The cycle became a sort of iron law in the early 1970s, when elections came to depend more and more on populist slogans and promises and when, through opinion engineering in mass media, the rise and fall of regimes and reputations began to be brought about and, at times, stage-managed.

Prime Minister Indira Gandhi set the ball rolling with the help of a cadre of clever, urbane bureaucrats and political advisers whose main skill was the management of media and, through it, of middle-class public opinion. As part of their style, they also acquired and popularized a radical idiom to serve as a source of their legitimacy. This was the first time that the media were used in this fashion and that a coalition of "committed bureaucrats," ambitious academics, journalists, and a new generation of palace politicians having no background in the Independence movement was forged in Indian politics.

Enormous expectations were aroused by these media managers and performers. Predictably, within a few years, despite their success in the Bangladesh war and in the testing of a nuclear explosive at Pokhran, both significant media events and vote-garnering devices, the ruling party faced a disappointed public. The enormous expectations led to enormous frustrations, which found expression not only in anxiety about the working of the system but also in widespread anger about corruption in the upper political rungs. A number of popular movements broke out in 1973-1974 to challenge the legitimacy of the regime. When, in 1975, Mrs. Gandhi declared the Emergency, she confirmed what was obvious to many, that she had lost the battle for political survival.

The Janata government dutifully replicated the pattern. The euphoria it generated when it came to power in 1977 started to evaporate in one and a half years. And, as the new incumbents were in the older mold of the organization men of the Congress party, poorer in public-opinion management and without much understanding of political salesmanship, the Janata cycle lasted a shorter time. Mrs. Gandhi went through the same script when she returned to power in 1980, and her son, who entered the scene in 1984, is now faithfully acting it out again.

Rajiv Gandhi started in 1984 with a clean slate. He did not have the quasi-criminal record of his late, much lamented brother. Better still, he did not have any political record at all. As a result, he looked especially clean in a system which to a large number of Indians had begun to look shockingly criminal. It was widely thought that he meant well, was not particularly beholden to special interests, wanted to make a break with the past and institute a more open style of politics.

It is an index of the power of the Iron Law that now, with his political fortunes in decline, Mr. Gandhi is reacting in the same way his mother did when her grip on power slackened. There are the same hired crowds for rallies, the same strident attacks on dissenters, the same attempts to choke off the political process by linking the fate of India to the fate of his government, and the same hoary idea of a universal anti-India conspiracy.

The operation of the Iron Law interlaces with larger problems of Indian politics. Though in the second half of a term, when a regime is in decline, it may seem as if all the institutions in the public realm are under equal stress, they are not. Many of the institutions are resisting the decay now evident in the Indian party system and political decision-making structures. Parts of the higher echelons of the judiciary, the bureaucracy, and the armed forces, for instance, have resisted, though not always successfully, institutional decline.

A regime, however, is primarily a political entity and it acquires buoyancy from its political health. Under the Iron Law, the decline in the political health of the system is temporarily covered up by the élan of a new regime and the drama of the fall of the old. This cover-up, in which the intelligentsia and the urban middle classes enthusiastically participate, explains much of the change from the euphoria of the first half of the tenure of a prime minister to the despondency of the second. The cover-up also ordains that, during the first half, no proper political instrument could be forged to pursue—or to give the impression of pursuing—the goals on which there is some national consensus or on which the support base built during the elections could be sustained.

In a de facto presidential system, the euphoria of the first two years and the feeling that elections are won through the management of media and middle-class opinion has an important by-product. The leader becomes suspicious of the formal political apparatus and tries to acquire a ring of "trustworthy" advisers from outside formal politics to devise the means to bypass the political process and keep the politicized Indians apolitically busy, that is, depoliticized. Naturally, only relatives, close friends, technocrats, and politicians without a base can provide such apolitical trustworthiness. Sports extravaganzas like cricket matches and the Asiad, cultural shows like the Festival of India and Apna Utsavs, and spectacular technological circuses like space flights and Antarctica expeditions can become the means of bypassing an unmanageable, unclean political process. Such events mobilize the political support of the temporarily depoliticized, newspaper- and TV-bound middle classes, willing to buy claptrap about computers and the twenty-first century, by which they understand little more than the achieving of Western consumption standards.

Politics, however, cannot be swept under the rug so easily. It has the tendency to return at the first opportunity. Also, when the political process is forced underground, it cannot be easily monitored. Thus, Mr. Gandhi is being forced to return to the politics swept aside as too dirty—the tired demonology about ill-intentioned neighbors and eager superpowers seeking to destabilize India with the help of internal saboteurs, the engineering of xenophobia through hints about minorities in league with foreign powers, and the constant attacks on institutions that resist state encroachments on their autonomy and their democratic rights.

Inevitably, there is now strong reaction to the populism and the overdone realpolitik. A number of public figures have found it convenient to emphasize the importance of political norms at a time when all mentions of norms have become indicators of political naiveté. Thus, for example, Mr. V. P. Singh, who has rebelled against the Congress leadership, has managed to politicize morality at a time when it was waiting to be politicized. Chief ministers Jyoti Basu, with his constant emphasis on public probity, and N. T. Rama Rao, with his saffron robes, as well as erstwhile chief minister Ramakrishna Hegde, with his idea of value-based politics, have already shown some awareness of the widespread anxiety about the present state of

Indian politics. Mr. Singh has come out of the heart of the system to respond to these anxieties.

Mr. Singh's political skills may be limited and his vision shallow. He may be self-consciously imitating the late Mr. J. P. Narayan, who brought down Mrs. Gandhi's regime in the mid-1970s by similarly politicizing what looked like a moral crusade. Yet, it does seem that had there been no Mr. Singh, the Indian system would have invented one. For he is only a projection of the advertised image of Mr. Gandhi, the image which won Mr. Gandhi his electoral victory. Mr. Singh is a living warning that one hazard of theatrical politics is being forcibly cast in someone else's political morality play.

Since the 1950s, a number of commentators on state formation and nation building have argued that that one aspect of political underdevelopment is the absence of impersonal, self-interest-based political realism. The Indian elites, too, have often pined for the golden days of the Arthashastra, the ancient text on hard-eyed statecraft. Mr. Gandhi in 1984–1985, with his promise to clean up politics, was seen by these elites as a perfect example of a politically unskilled neophyte. Yet, it was this touch of innocence which was his main attraction to the electorate. To many, he was correcting for the excessive Machiavellianism of his mother. Now that he has entered the dominant culture of politics, Mr. Singh has taken advantage of the resulting void and stepped into an available role.

Despite what looks like the inexorable logic of the Iron Law, in retrospect we can see that some options were once open to Mr. Gandhi. He could have ridden the demand for moral politics, for he was well positioned in the first half of his term to do a part of the work that needed to be done. He did get praise for his antidefection bill, designed to curb the legislators' propensity to switch parties for personal gain, even though many of the state units of his party and he himself had been involved in the defection game. He could have scripted a popular morality play if, after his expensive campaign, he had changed the system of electoral financing so that he did not have to depend on kickbacks from defense purchases or largesse from business houses. After all, such dependence had already become risky, thanks to the same media explosion of which his mother and he himself had made such excellent political use. He could have even purged the Congress party of some of its more notorious criminal elements; there was no chance of anyone rebelling at that time. He did none of these things. He spent time on grand spectacles—cultural, political, and technological.

It follows that, till the next elections, the temperature in Indian public life will remain high. There will be state-sponsored chauvinism in international affairs and suspicion of minorities, dissenting ideologies, and alternate ways of life. The pressure on the press and civil rights groups, too, may rise, as the public mood turns more hostile to the regime and the regime strikes back.

Under the circumstances, the job of the opposition may seem cut out for its members. Obviously, they will have to work toward ending the present regime unheroically when its term is over. Any attempt prematurely or artificially to finish the regime may allow it to steal the mantle of the opposition the way Mrs. Gandhi did in 1971. Similarly, any attempt to act out a demonology may misfire, as Mrs. Gandhi and her entourage found out in 1977 and as the Janata party stalwarts Messrs. Charan Singh, Madhu Limaye, and George Fernandes discovered in 1980. The opposition will also have to keep alive public skepticism about ultranationalism, so that it does not become an instrument of electoral mobilization.

The analytically obvious, however, is not the politically feasible. The main opposition parties share with the ruling party the same political culture. The leaders of these parties are not equipped to look beyond the culture that has sustained them so long and given meaning to their lives. Despite them, however, this regime, like all regimes during the last two decades, may lose in the next elections. But the new regime, too, will face the same problems and the same scenario unless it has the courage to tackle in the first half of its term the unpleasant and persistent problems of the Indian political culture.

This long discussion of the culture of new politics should ideally be matched with a detailed discussion of the new kinds of persons who can survive or succeed in Indian politics. I shall shirk that responsibility and only summarize my reading of the situation here.

A valuable clue to the personality of the new politician and the changing psychological demands of Indian politics was provided two years ago by A. K. Roy, a Marxist trade unionist, in the form of an obituary for Babu Jagjivan Ram, the Congress leader who had the longest tenure as a cabinet minister, from 1937 to 1980. Deeply respectful toward Ram's enormous political and administrative skills in the obituary, Roy recognizes that the Indian political system had a place for Babuji, as Ram was affectionately called, even if the old warhorse never really knew what to do with that place.[7] What Roy implies but does not say is that, after nearly fifty years in a successful political career, toward the end of his life Babuji had to face the fact that time had passed him by. A highly intelligent and sophisticated man, Babuji had in his life effortlessly straddled colonial and post-colonial politics and urban and rural India. But his unphotogenic, crude, dhoti-clad looks, the "Babu" in front of his name, which identified him as an outsider to the emerging culture of mass politics in India, his low-key image and subdued style, his dependence on traditional organizational and institutional processes for his political power, especially his masterly understanding of caste and factional alignments, even his mode of using political corruption—in fact, the entire configuration of qualities that made him such a formidable political presence from the late 1930s to the mid-1970s—had ceased to be an asset by the time Babuji died in 1986. Not that the qualities and traits had become irrelevant to Indian politics, but only that other qualities had become more important at the highest level of public life. Thus, the Jagjivan Rams can no longer be advertised or sold by the media as prime-ministerial material. They cannot interest the urban middle-class Indians who have begun to set the pace in Indian politics.

As the place occupied by the Jagjivan Rams has shrunk, Indian politics has become more open to new sets of public figures who represent other configurations of skills. One particular set that has become salient in the last few years deserves mention, for it seeks to be a counterpoint to both the traditional political bosses and the "amoral," "pure political" set operating at the borderlines of law within the system. This set is represented by public figures who have remarkably sparse knowledge of the political role of caste and other traditional loyalties, whose access to the traditional life-style and ways of thinking is primarily secondhand, and who, when they speak of organizations and institutions, mainly have modern organizations and institutions in mind. Even ten years ago, Sam Pitroda and Romi Chopra could not have dreamt of having the political presence they currently have. Their urbaneness, look, dress, and accent and even their Anglicized first names would have seemed politically esoteric and would have handicapped them.

Between the Jagjivan Rams and the Sam Pitrodas lie, however, a whole range of political functionaries who have been brought up in the older culture of politics but who know that its days are over. They are trying desperately to retool themselves, to adjust to the new concepts of political craftsmanship. One guesses that at least some who have distinguished themselves in recent years, by forging a comfortable bonding between crime and politics in India, are persons who feel that they have only pushed to a logical conclusion what they see as the political success of the amoral instrumental rationality of modern technology and opinion management.

The late Erich Fromm, old-fashioned though he may seem to the world of psychology today, perhaps had a concept relevant to what the Indians are witnessing today. Certainly he would have been delighted to find in Indian politics a near-perfect instance of the character type he used to say had a marketing orientation, represented by persons who are in business not with commodities but with their own personalities.[8] In a manner of speaking, these persons do not have an identifiable core; they change to adjust to their contexts, to whatever is politically useful and/or profitable.

Scholars interested in the vicissitudes of the self in Indian culture will not be terribly surprised if one proposes that Fromm's marketing orientation may be the prototypical pathology of the Indian self in a mass society. When Arun Nanda of Rediffusion, the advertising agency that marketed Rajiv Gandhi during the last elections, proudly says that he had a good product to sell,[9] his concept of goodness derives from the idea of salability, and that salability in turn is connected to a particular form of indefinability. This indefinability invites the buyers to project their own ideologies, stereotypes, and desires onto the product being marketed; it also allows the sellers to change the content of the product overnight in response to public demand.

While the likes of Mr. Jagjivan Ram also showed chameleonlike qualities when the situation demanded, and while their political allegiance might be on sale, their selfhood was not. They could not alter their personalities according to a script fashioned by public relations consultants in response to the latest popularity polls. In this respect, the new demands of Indian politics are not very different from similar demands in other competitive, democratic systems. From President Ronald Reagan to Member of Parliament Illona

Staller alias La Cicciolina, from Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi to actor-turned-freewheeling-politician-and-businessman Amitabh Bachchan—in each case one is dealing with a person who has the capacity to reflect the middle-class self-images in slightly exaggerated versions while maintaining the accessibility of the images, intellectual, moral, and political.

In large, complex, open systems, the accessibility is partly ensured by analyzing all dissent that comes from outside the systems in pejorative terms derived from the ideology of the systems. In such analysis, increasingly available in a packaged form in the liberal democracies, working among the tribals and the rural poor becomes romantic Gandhian obscurantism or left-wing adventurism, ethnic demands get identified with fundamentalism, and all peasant movements become the self-assertion of kulaks. Once dissent is redefined this way, the more unpredictable dissenters can be handled in two ways. Their capacity to exercise their democratic rights can be reduced by building a consensus against them through the manipulation of middle-class opinion. (The rights are never abrogated as in an authoritarian polity, but they are made to "lapse" by the manufactured forgetfulness of the vocal citizenry.) Alternatively, such "eccentrics" are occasionally allowed into the mainstream under sufferance, as means of fixing political opponents or as living certificates to the openness of the system when they gate-crash into the mainstream on their own.

Show business in such a context becomes the preferred recruiting ground for ready-made leaders of the political mainstream.[10] The heroes in show business traditionally have the responsibility of heroically establishing the supremacy of conventionality and the conventional concept of the good citizen. They project the ultimate paradigm of conformity in a mass culture. Much before Ronald Reagan entered American public life in a big way, M. G. Ramachandran and K. Karunanidhi had become the main contestants for political attention in South India.[11] And it is not surprising that since Ramachandran's death in December 1987, the two women bitterly fighting for his political mantle are both retired film actresses. The leader of the largest opposition party in the present Parliament, who is also the chief minister of one of the largest opposition-ruled states, is a retired actor, too. The presence in Parliament of a large number of film stars and the increasingly important roles being played in the public life by sports heroes, science managers, media-conscious artists, and other nonpolitical public figures all go into the making of a mass culture of politics and into the growing lability of public opinion in India.

DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM

The culture of Indian politics can be seen as a unique case, or it can be seen as the epitome of the culture of democratic polities the world over. Thanks to the growth of global sensitivities and communications, one can speak of a global democratic community today. Within this community, despite the barriers of individual cultures, certain crosscurrents tend to flow and certain kinds of borrowings do take place.

For example, the buying and selling of political leaders through the media, under the guidance of whiz kids of modern management, was first perfected in the United States. But it has been pushed to its logical conclusion in India, where the pathway from film studios to charismatic political leadership has now been neatly laid out. Likewise, the use of sports to underwrite national solidarity and as a measure of national performance might have been first tried out successfully in Australia, but it has since found its most vociferous spokesmen in South Asia. It is in this context that I shall reread the recent experiences of India as a general problem of democratic governance the world over.

A certain fear of the people, one suspects, has become the dark underside of every modern state. In the liberal democratic states this fear takes a special form.

Each democracy is an act of faith in the sense that each represents, however imperfectly, a commitment to liberal values and a trust in the political judgment of the people. Yet each is dependent on elaborate institutional arrangements to protect these values from the people. One suspects that behind the act of faith hide age-old fears: fear of the gullibility of the people, seen as all too capable of turning into mobs (note the British elite's anxiety after the French Revolution and during the period of expanding franchise); fear of the volatility and the transient, half-baked preferences of the masses (remember the institutional checks against populism devised by archpopulist Charles de Gaulle in France); fear of the emotional vulnerability of the ordinary citizens in international relations, dominated by amoral, conspiratorial powers (Henry Kissinger's fears about nuclear disarmament and the security community's anxiety in Rajiv Gandhi's India); and fear of the people's innocence about and subvertibility to the tinsel glitter of international capitalism (the dominant idiom in India during the radical phase of Indira Gandhi's tenure).

Many guesses can be made about the nature of this ambivalence—the mixture of faith and distrust—toward the citizen. It is possible, for instance, to hazard a guess that the modern state, even when it is avowedly liberal-democratic, does draw a line between democracy and freedom and locate freedom in dispassionate, rational perception of reality and in the optimism of a progressivist theory of history. The commitment to the democratic order becomes then a statement of hope that the populace will ultimately internalize the enlightenment values on which only genuine statecraft can be built and tolerate in the meanwhile the state pursuing these values with a touch of paternalism. In other words, even in an open society, the modern state expects the citizens to prove their commitment to freedom and rationality by accepting and acting according to the meaning of freedom and rationality given to them by the state and by not pushing the state too far toward accepting the diverse versions of freedom and rationality available.

The Indian experience is uncommon in that this relationship between democracy and freedom is as yet open. Thanks to the limited reach of modern communications in the country, there are just too many Indians who refuse to be placated by the fact that they have democratic rights; they want to exercise the right to protect or actualize their diverse visions of a free society. Democracy and freedom may still be partly orthogonal in India but, because one is dealing with a small mass society or cultural melting pot having a vast rural hinterland, such orthogonality remains the feature of a small part of the society. To the majority of Indians, freedom seems inseparable from participatory democracy.

While the modern sector in India believes that India will ultimately replicate the West European experience with liberal democracy and walk the pathway from seventeenth-century renaissance to late twentieth-century technocratic capitalism, those outside that sector see the future as open. To them, participatory democracy, rather than spectacular development or advancement in megascience, is the major instrument for ensuring their democratic future. In fact, a part of the growing resistance to the ideas of development and modern science in India derives from the contradiction that has arisen between them and the democratic process. To those who fully vest the idea of freedom in scientific rationality and successful development, this contradiction is a disaster. To those who see around them the collapsing edifice of conventional wisdom, this is a welcome pluralization and politicization of systems of knowledge and modes of social intervention.

ENDNOTES

This article was completed in 1988 when the author was at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington, D.C. The statements and views expressed herein are those of the author, however, and not necessarily those of the center.

[1] Only a year ago, a not particularly bright Indian ambassador vetoed the exhibition in the Soviet Union of a new film by the gifted filmmaker G. Aravindan. The film is on the unity and complementarity of the male and the female principles in the cosmos, as reflected in the *ardhanarishvara* incarnation of Shiva. "We are not half-women but full men," the ambassador decisively declared. See Sunil Sethi, "T. N. Kaul Scraps Festival Film," *Sunday Mail*, 6 March 1988.

[2] See K. P. Jayaswal, *Hindu Polity: A Constitutional History of India in Hindu Times* (Bangalore: Bangalore Printing and Publication Co., 1943).

[3] Jawaharlal Nehru, *The Discovery of India* (Bombay: Vikas, 1972).

[4] For instance, see Asghar Ali Engineer, *Bhiwandi-Bombay Riots: Analysis and Documentation* (Bombay: Institute of Islamic Studies, 1984). For a development of this theme, see Ashis Nandy, "The Politics of Secularism and the Recovery of Religious Tolerance," *Alternatives* 13 (1988): 177–94.

[5] See for example Praful Bidwai, "Ruling on National Anthem," *Times of India*, 28–29 August 1986; Madhu Kishwar, "A Crisis of Identity," *Illustrated Weekly of India*, 8 March 1987.

[6] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: The Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[7] A. K. Roy, "Return of Jagjivan Ram," *Statesman*, 28 July 1986.

[8] Erich Fromm, *The Sane Society* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1955).

[9] *Indian Express*, 24 February 1985.

[10] The awareness has reached the media. See for example Iqbal Masud, "Media 'Hype': The Opiate of the Masses," *Indian Express*, 1 January 1984; Khalid Mohamed, " 'Mard' the M. P.," *Times of India*, 1 December 1985; Geeta

Doctor, "Cinema War Breaks Out," *Sunday Observer*, 2 August 1987; and "The Man Who Played God—And Won," *Statesman*, 17 January 1988.

[11] There is of course a difference between the first generation of film personalities in Tamilnadu politics and the new political media merchants. The former did not use their base in the film world to bypass organized politics; the latter did so. See Robert Hardgrave, *When Stars Displace the Gods* (Austin, Tex.: Center for Asian Studies, 1975) for a description of the earlier phase.

The Past and the Present: An Indian Dialogue

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Since Mauryan emperors dispatched their war chariots to conquer the subcontinent and Mughals transformed their camps into glittering courts, Indian politics have unfolded with regularity. Dynasties began rule by binding India's principalities into their imperial domains, only to end as power seeped back into peripheries. Knowing this, Mahatma Gandhi stoked his struggle against the British Raj in the villages so that the Independence movement could sweep all of India. Today, ministers of the Congress government in Delhi, as the inheritors of Gandhi's legacy, anxiously watch as provincial loyalties again gain ascendancy over national ones. Can the center hold?

The transformation of an agricultural society like India into a modern industrial polity is a truly epochal undertaking. This process, which reaches out to diverse facets of social life, is related to the generation and distribution of wealth in society and to the change from one system of social production to another. The emergence of an industrial community also calls for the transformation of old and the creation of new social and political institutions in society. Such transformation and creation is necessary, partly to resolve the problems of social disorder associated with industrialization and partly also to draw a wide range of classes and communities into the

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political and economic processes that undergird the emergence of an industrial polity. Last but not least, the growth of an industrial society calls for changes in the values that inform individuals and social classes and that provide the ruling elites as well as the popular classes with the moral poise necessary to stability in the midst of drastic social and economic change.

In any society, transformation that reaches out to the economy and the polity, on the one hand, and to social institutions and moral values, on the other, calls for creation, innovation, and adaptation of a very high order. Comparative historians know all too well that although the industrialization of a society involves certain changes in the manner in which wealth is generated, the trajectories of societies that have undergone such change are characterized as much by common experiences as by variations in the configuration of such experiences.[1] Perhaps the most familiar path to industrialization is that of Great Britain, which blazed a pioneering trail for others to follow in the first half of the nineteenth century.[2] Yet even the British experience—which revolved around the generation and mobilization of capital, new technology, and skills by the landed gentry, the mercantile classes, artisans, and the peasantry—is not one about whose content scholars have reached a consensus. Moreover, whatever the British trajectory, there is little doubt that countries like Germany, France, the United States, and the Soviet Union, to mention only a few that followed Great Britain into the age of industrialization, transformed their economies through strategies very different from those pursued by the first industrial nation.

Scholars rarely question the argument that the experience of the other countries provides no simple clues to how an agricultural society can successfully undergo industrialization and at the same time transform its social and political institutions and recast its moral order. However, it is clear to the historian, no less than to the political economist and the social philosopher, that the past of a society—the changing relationships over time between individuals and social classes, material and cultural values, social institutions and political processes—determines to no small degree the manner in which that society transforms itself into a modern industrial community. There is, moreover, strong reason to believe that India is no exception to the rule that the past reaches out powerfully to the present and that history is a continual dialogue between what has happened and what is happening.[3] Over and above this, it is necessary to stress that the past of a society illuminates its present, but the way in which the past is perceived also shapes the future.

This brief review of the relationship, as I see it, between the past and the present of a society leads us directly into the principal concerns of this essay. What are the enduring characteristics of Indian society as it undergoes a transformation from an agricultural to an industrial polity? To what extent does the past impinge on the present, stimulate or constrain the rhythms of change, and thereby determine the emerging landscape of the country? While the direction and pace of change in the generation and distribution of wealth are relatively clear, they are not so clear as far as other facets of the social order—the structure of society, the institutions of politics, and the visions of the "good life" entertained by the high as well the low—are concerned. Nor is the relationship, if any, between these facets—specifically, the relationship between the emerging industrial economy and the institutions of society and politics, or the prevailing values—at all clear. This essay focuses in particular on such institutions and cultural formations as they pertain to India. We seek insights into changing social reality that are of interest not only to historians of India but also to scholars who reflect on the human condition in general.

To clear the ground for the substantive themes of this essay, it would be appropriate to dwell briefly, at this juncture, on a few other issues. There is a widespread impression, reflected alike in conservative, liberal, and radical historiography, that the social structure and the political economy of India changed very little in the centuries preceding the recent centuries. Behind this belief lie two radically different modes of perceiving the past—namely, the mythic and the historical. In precolonial India, for instance, the past was reconstructed largely through myth, symbol, and sacerdotal literature. True, this past rested on specific social processes and political happenings and created for the people a memory of their moral and material heritage, which was expressed through the language of poetry rather than the language of the human sciences. Furthermore, the very notion of linear time, calibrated into precise and measurable units, was largely absent from the social discourse of India before the dawn of modernity. In contrast, in modern societies, which are the products of an industrial transformation, the past is reconstructed along a linear and calibrated axis, partly through an analysis of extant evidence and partly also through social theories based on the methods of scientific inquiry. It would, therefore, be legitimate to define myths as the historiography of pre-industrial societies and history as the mythology of industrial societies.

What makes our portrayal of the manner in which the past was perceived in India a singularly baffling business, however, is the fact that the liberal or radical imagination, as it applied itself to the study of Indian society, accepted without question the notion of an unchanging, timeless polity, articulated by the literati who spoke for the indigenous tradition. There are various versions of this myth of an unchanging India. A number of historians, irrespective of their ideological leanings, subscribed to the view that the civilization of India was characterized by certain distinctive features, such as an authoritarian and despotic state, the absence of private property in land, and the existence of self-sufficient village communities of great antiquity, which were in turn molded by the unique institution of caste. Taken altogether, the different attributes of Indian society mentioned above, plus the values of elite and popular Hinduism, resulted (so ran the argument) in a stagnant social order in which the tyranny of tradition was reinforced by the despotism of the state and left no room for moral experimentation or social praxis.[4]

Perhaps an even more telling illustration of the distortion wrought through attempts at comprehension across cultures is the picture of India in the mid-nineteenth century that emerges from the writings of Karl Marx.[5] Not surprisingly, Marx was deeply interested in colonial India as part of his wider interest in the dialectics of capitalism as a potentially universal phenomenon. It is easy to demonstrate that Marx's delineation of the Asiatic mode of production, or of the trajectory of social development in colonial societies, or of the village communities of India, leaned on the works of historians who were in turn deeply influenced by traditional perceptions of the past. For instance, more often than not, the pioneering historians of India—imperialist, liberal, or radical—utterly failed to appreciate the gulf between traditional historical understanding and actual reality in Indian society. Indeed, if their perceptions had not been flawed through cross-cultural blinkers, these scholars would have perceived in the history of India constant flux and change. They would also have perceived the ingenuity with which a supposedly unchanging tradition was repeatedly reshaped to provide moral legitimacy or explanatory mechanisms for dramatic social change.

I

Despite the dangers of seeing the past through the distorting prism of the present, perhaps the best way to capture the tension between what has happened and what is happening in India is to dwell briefly on the contemporary scene in the subcontinent. The distinguishing features that spring into relief through such an exercise lend themselves with great facility to scholarly explorations in depth at the same time as we attempt to respond, however tentatively, to the crucial question whether the past constricts or stimulates desirable social change in the country. This is not to suggest a mechanical pursuit of issues or questions that loom large in India today through past centuries. Such a view of history as a discipline that illumines the contemporary human condition would be vulgar and misleading. This is merely to suggest the adoption of a reversal of the conventional mode in history—the pursuit of narrative and analysis from the past to the present—as the method most appropriate to a comprehension of the contemporary scene.

The scholar who attempts to explore the landscape of contemporary India is forcibly struck by the rapid pace of change in its social, political, and economic texture. Here is an agricultural society of considerable antiquity seeking to transform itself in a very short time, indeed in a generation or two, into a modern industrial nation. Such a transformation, needless to say, presupposes the quick resolution of a wide range of problems, some of which occupied other societies for centuries before any noticeable results were forthcoming, even if we discount the demographic and the spatial scale of India. The industrial transformation of India calls, in the first instance, for a reconstruction of the rural economy, which was burdened till very recently by an outdated institutional infrastructure as well as an inefficient technology and a very large work force. The work force consisted of a substantial proportion of a population of 400 million in 1950 and of 780 million near our own times. The restructuring of the rural economy, needless to say, has to be accomplished at the same time as the creation of a modern industrial sector. The problems of generating such economic activity in India for the first time in its long history are complex and varied. There is a need for new capital and novel skills in entrepreneurship, management, technology, and labor. There is also a need for the natural resources—energy, or the products of extractive industries, for instance—that constitute an essential ingredient of industrial activity. Finally, there is a need for internal and external markets to stimulate demand for the goods produced by industry. To cut a long story short, the industrialization of India calls for the breaking up of a vicious circle of poverty and low productivity, and its replacement with purposive economic activity in which human labor, underpinned by modern technology, generates the wealth and conjures into existence the cultural ethos necessary for sustained economic growth.

The economic is by no means the only domain in which the industrial transformation of society calls for concerted effort on the part of its ruling as well as its popular classes. Nor are we, in this essay, primarily concerned with the economic problems of social transformation, notwithstanding the significant role they play in such a process. However, the social, political, and cultural changes that characterize a society as it undergoes industrialization contribute no less significantly to this transformation than the purely economic changes. Indeed, the fragmentation of a social system into these distinctive facets is merely a Cartesian analytical device. It is adopted in the belief that such a breakdown of complex reality leads to a certain facility in comprehension and analysis. It also rests on the assumption that the aggregation of the several constituents, after their analysis, recaptures the whole faithfully and accurately.

II

As we survey the scene from the vantage point of the late twentieth century, we have good reason to dwell on the state and the political order in India. It would be appropriate to do so for two reasons. First, because the strengths no less than the weaknesses of a polity, and its capacity to withstand the stresses and strains of the industrial transformation are crucial to the success of the latter process. Second, the historical character of the state and the political order not only illumines the contemporary scene but also provides insights into the way in which the strengths of the polity can be deployed to facilitate the emergence of an industrial society.

It would be legitimate to observe that at first sight all does not seem to be well with the polity in India. Indeed, a cursory reading of the contemporary history of the subcontinent could run along the following lines. During the closing decades of the nineteenth and the opening decades of the twentieth century, a powerful nationalist movement came into existence in India under a skilled leadership drawn from the professional classes, the landed gentry, and the commercial bourgeoisie. This movement threw up in the Indian National Congress a party that was quite literally a "parliament of nationalism" and the dominant organized expression of the struggle against British imperialism. As is also well known, during the first few decades of its existence, the Congress party was unable to reach out to the popular classes, namely, the peasantry, the artisans, the industrial workers, and the tribal communities, although these classes had from time to time registered their hostility to the British Raj through violent outbreaks, which were suppressed with considerable brutality. However, with the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi as the dominant nationalist leader in the 1920s, the middle classes successfully attracted to an anti-imperialist alliance the popular classes in the subcontinent. As a result of this alliance, the charismatic Mahatma and his political lieutenants were able to launch countrywide struggles against British imperialism, which were truly formidable in their scale and social depth. These struggles were ultimately successful in forcing the British to quit India in 1947.

When India gained freedom in 1947, the political scene was dominated by the Indian National Congress, which had brought together various communities and classes into a powerful nationalist alliance. The leaders of this party, men like Jawaharlal Nehru, Vallabhai Patel, Maulana Azad, Rajendra Prasad, and C. Rajagopalachari, to mention only a few, possessed substantial experience in politics. Their collective wisdom enabled them to devise, by 1950, a constitution for India, which envisaged a liberal polity resting on adult franchise. The Constitution of India also sought for the citizen economic rights in tune with the principles of social democracy in the middle decades of the twentieth century. The ruling party (the Congress) rested on a subcontinental organization, laboriously built up through participation in nationalist struggles and in social reconstruction over half a century. The organization of the Congress party reached out through provincial cities and district towns to a substantial proportion of the half million villages that dotted the rural landscape. By the time India became independent, in every substantial village of the subcontinent, the presence of this party was visible through small circles of activists and sympathizers. The organizational strength of the Congress party plus the rich experience of its leaders enabled India to enjoy a degree of political stability and a measure of success in creating and operating democratic institutions that were without parallel in the colonial societies liberated after the Second World War. However, when the pre-1947 generation of leaders disappeared from the scene, there was a visible decrease in the strength of the Congress party, although it continued to play a dominant role in the politics of the subcontinent. Furthermore, a major weakness of the polity within the framework of liberal democracy was its inability to offer the people the option of voting to power a party other than the Congress. When such an alternative was hastily conjured into existence in 1977, in response to the emergency of 1975–1977, the experiment proved to be a short and disastrous one. If the political process failed to provide a viable national alternative to the Congress party, it nevertheless created local and regional political formations that challenged, at appropriate levels, the authority of that party. To sum up this terse review of Indian politics, since 1947 there has been a weakening of the Congress party, the pan-Indian political organization that grew out of the struggle for independence; yet no alternative party capable of providing governance to the country has emerged.[6]

What are the factors behind the political malaise that apparently looms so large over the contemporary political scene? To answer this question, we have to turn to the history of India during the centuries before the British conquest. Scholars who do so inevitably dwell on the fact that the unity of Indian civilization has over the centuries been underpinned largely by social rather than political institutions. Nevertheless, recent explorations into the historical character of the state in the subcontinent have brought to light some remarkable facts concerning the political, as distinct from the social and cultural, institutions that characterize and define Indian society, however imperfectly they may do so.

During past centuries the political institutions of India provided the basis for a measure of cohesion and order at three levels. At the local level, there existed small principalities referred to as "little kingdoms" by the scholar who first identified them.[7] These principalities, the most durable political structures in the subcontinent, historically speaking, consisted of several score villages tightly controlled by a kinship community of landowners whose elders functioned as the landlords of the regions and exercised political authority over the social classes residing there. At various stages in the history of India, these little kingdoms were drawn, through conquest or internecine conflict, into kingdoms of substantial scale, which feature in historical narratives as readily identifiable states at the regional level. The regional kingdoms could in turn yield to subcontinental polities—like the Mauryan state of the third century B.C. or the Mughal state of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—which were able to establish themselves over the country as a whole. If the history of India were traced over a long span of time, then the pan-Indian consolidations would stand out as important epochs during which social and economic activity flourished at a heightened level in the subcontinent. However, the pan-Indian polities often broke down because of internal tension and external agression, and they were followed by interregnums during which regional kingdoms characterized the political order. The regional kingdoms, too, could on occasion break up into the local principalities that constituted the basal units of the polity in the subcontinent.

The three levels of political authority—the local, the regional, and the subcontinental—that marked the hierarchical structure of the polity do not fully explain the tenuousness of political institutions in India. Nor do they explain the tendency of the pan-Indian state, or even its regional constituents, to disintegrate into the little kingdoms that made up the basic building blocks of the political order. The reasons for the fragility of the subcontinental and the regional political structures can be understood only by comparing the polity of India with other polities of comparable demographic and geographic scale. The historians of China, for instance, have commented at length on the pivotal place that the institution of bureaucracy, ensconced in the moral penumbra of Confucianism, occupied in its polity. The clearly delineated relations of subordination and superordination within this institution, the mode of recruitment of civil servants through mechanisms that ensured a community of values, and the manner in which successive imperial dynasties displaced each other without any changes in the bureaucracy as a system indicate the central role that the civil service played in the Chinese polity. At the same time they explain (presumably, along with other factors) the strength of the imperial system in China.[8]

It is necessary to emphasize that no institution comparable to the Chinese bureaucracy was devised in India prior to the British conquest of the subcontinent. At the local level, within the framework of the little kingdoms, the principle of kinship and community was the principle invoked most frequently of all in providing various political and administrative functionaries for governance. These functionaries were thus linked to the ruler of the domain through kinship ties. They were also connected with the heads of rural communities, who presided over the social networks that characterized the matrix of society at the grass roots.[9] Similar mechanisms were at work on the level of the regional kingdoms, which were constituted through the integration of the little principalities. Here again, it was the kinship links with the leaders of various autochthonous groups that provided the regional ruler with political and administrative functionaries. What was true of the regional states was also true of the state at the pan-Indian level. To consolidate their power, the imperial rulers who controlled the pan-Indian states, too, were obliged to reach out to the heads of powerful kinship communities and leaders of landed elites. The integration of the Mughal Empire by the emperor Akbar in the second half of the sixteenth century is an excellent illustration of such a process.[10]

In the *mansabdari* system, Akbar created an institution that can be described as a protobureaucracy undergirding the Mughal state. The members of this institution performed both civil and military functions, and were rewarded through *jagirs*, or estates of land, to enable them to fulfill their service obligations. The *mansabdars* did not, however, subscribe to a distinctive set of values like the Confucian values that informed the members of the imperial civil service in China.

The social composition of the mansabdars further reinforces our description of their order as a protobureaucracy.[11] Initially the mansabdars were recruited from among those who had accompanied the Mughals from central Asia during the initial conquest of North India. But the need for drawing influential members of the indigenous social classes into this institution soon became obvious, and the emperor Akbar reached out to *zamindars*, or landed aristocrats, and the heads of landed communities—the most prominent being the Katoch Rajputs of the Kangra region and the Kachwahas of Rajasthan—for the purpose of creating in the mansabdari system a pillar of the Mughal state. The integration of powerful zamindars, who controlled rural communities and had substantial landed wealth of their own, into the Mughal Empire conjured into existence the foundations of the new polity and was a crucial instrument of state policy. But the history of this empire also reveals the fragility of the consolidation achieved through the induction of powerful landed elements, who enjoyed regional or local dominance, into the service of the state. Despite the rewards of imperial service, such men were the most restless elements in the empire. Indeed, their restlessness contributed in no small measure to the destabilization of the Mughal polity in the first quarter of the eighteenth century. Even at the height of Mughal power, during the reigns of Akbar, Jahangir, and Shah Jahan, rebellions of both local and regional landlords were a constant threat to the empire, and considerable time and energy were spent in suppressing them. But when through a combination of economic and political factors the Mughal polity suffered a drastic diminution in its strength, the *jagirdars* and zamindars went completely out of hand. They were instrumental in the creation of the regional states that characterized the political scene in the eighteenth century, prior to the British conquest of the subcontinent.[12]

III

This delineation of the fragility of the political institutions at the regional and subcontinental levels raises some crucial questions about the cohesiveness of the various constituents of Indian society. As already emphasized, unlike China, India did not possess a bureaucratic or a political infrastructure that could account for the extraordinary durability of her civilization and the cohesiveness of her diverse cultures. What, then, were the ties which held the diverse classes, communities, and regions in India within the framework of a common civilization? How were these ties shaped? What were the means through which a corpus of common values was articulated through the social order? Finally, how was the fabric of society linked to the political system?

In answering such questions, it is necessary to reiterate the familiar observation that the cohesion of Indian civilization rested more on social institutions and moral values than on political institutions and the fabric of the state. But this observation needs to be substantiated, if only very briefly, in the present context. In the first instance, it may be observed that the prescriptive institution of *varna* and the existential institution of *jati* were known to constitute the foundations of the social order within India.[13] Jatis, which were endogamous groups dispersed in distinctive geographical regions, also played a specific role in the generation of wealth. The jatis within a region and between different regions were related to each other through the institution of varna, which provided specific jatis with an indication of their place in the hierarchy of society. More recently, the institution of jati has also been related to a locus on a purity-impurity scale.[14] Both these perceptions of Hindu society, it is worth emphasizing, dwelt upon the social and moral rather than the political order as the true basis of cohesion and bonding within it. It may also be emphasized that despite differences in their worldviews, the communities of Islam and Christianity in India, too, were shaped by principles of social coherence comparable to the principles at work within the Hindu communities.

While the cohesiveness provided by jati and varna features frequently in scholarly writings, it is necessary to focus on yet another organizing principle in order to fully understand the unity underlying Indian civilization. There is a perception of Indian civilization, still enshrined in conservative circles, which suggests that the philosophical core of Hinduism—embodied in the Upanishads, the Bhagavad Gita, and the Vedanta sutras—articulates itself with great vigor through the hierarchical ranks of caste and class and ties diverse Hindu communities in bonds of cultural unity by providing them with a common worldview.[15] This perception needs to be altered for one to get a true understanding of the processes of moral integration that characterize Hindu society. The unity of Hindu society is not so much determined by its high culture as it is shaped by the "middle" traditions of devotional and popular theism embodied in the bhakti movement. Although their roots can be traced to the classical past, these traditions articulated themselves with great philosophical and social vigor at the commencement of the second millennium A.D. and, in doing so, prepared the basis for the cohesive regional cultures that characterize the social fabric of contemporary India. The relationship between the middle traditions and the Brahminical high culture, on the one hand, and the local or folk traditions, characterizing specific jati or tribal communities, on the other, is a complex relationship that is difficult to spell out in the present context. Suffice it to mention here that the social ethos of the devotional theisms, in turn, reached out to local belief and practice in order to integrate the moral world of the folk communities into the high culture of Hinduism. The centrality of the middle traditions to Hindu society needs to be emphasized at this juncture, if only for the reason that this cultural bonding was initially expressed through the "great tradition"–"little tradition" framework developed in the process of reflecting on peasant cultures in South America. At the same time, it is necessary to reactivate this notion, as modified above, to gain an understanding of a crucial characteristic of Indian civilization in the past as well as the present.[16]

Such a delineation of the cultural factors underpinning Indian civilization has profound implications for social action and political transformation within this civilization. It is, for instance, clear that since the level of political institutionalization was modest, the political actor had a relatively modest role to play in shaping society. Indeed, prior to the advent of Islam, which brought in the notion of a more cohesive state, emperors and kings had little more than a legitimizing role to play within the polity. The institution of kingship in Hindu society, as defined in sacerdotal literature or as analyzed in historical writings, is an institution lacking the power it possessed in other societies. Hence, the fact that the political history of India, particularly before the advent of Islam, lends itself only with some difficulty to cohesive and orderly narration.[17]

Scholars have recently observed that whereas an individual lodged within the institutions of jati and varna enjoyed relatively limited freedom of social action, the *sannyasin*, or ascetic, who transcended jati and varna, possessed personal freedom of a high order. The ascetic also commanded tremendous moral influence over the hierarchical orders of society. This insight has inspired a substantial corpus of literature concerning the bases of social action in Indian society, the categories of individuals who can inspire such action, the quality of their moral influence, and the effect of such action on the course of history in India.[18]

Even before the strategic position of the "moral actor" in Indian society had been recognized, the fact that it was men of spiritual rather than political stature who had successfully initiated social action and wrought social transformation in the subcontinent was well known. However, recent insights into the springs of social action and the bases of moral power in Indian civilization have provided such an understanding of action and power with a new scholarly rigor. This is not to suggest that the political actor has never been able to influence the course of events within India. However, in instances when secular rulers were successful in shaping decisive events, they did so by superimposing on their political authority a moral stature, which endowed their utterances and actions with a heightened significance. The Mauryan emperor Asoka immediately comes to mind in this context. Asoka inherited a substantial domain from his father, Bimbisara; and through the conquest of Kalinga, Asoka extended this domain to include the whole of the subcontinent. However, it was through projecting himself as the "beloved of the gods" and the propagator of a new moral order that he was able to exercise a profound influence on the diverse social communities inhabiting his empire. The edicts of Asoka, which were placed throughout his domain—at crossroads, at market centers, and at sites marked by popular congregations—speak eloquently of the moral power the emperor appropriated to himself. Indeed, these edicts provided a backdrop to the extraordinary dialogue Asoka initiated with his people. If for a moment we forget the twentieth century, it is legitimate to assert that no ruler in India exercised an influence comparable to that of Asoka. It is equally legitimate to assert that this influence rested just as much on the secular authority vested in the emperor as it did on the strength that accrued to him through the *dhamma*, or the moral order, which he sought to disseminate among the people.[19]

The career of the Mughal emperor Akbar, who stands as the dominating figure of the medieval centuries, echoes the career of his Mauryan predecessor. Like Asoka, Akbar, during the first phase of his long reign, extended his sway over new territories and firmly established Mughal rule over the subcontinent. But once the business of conquest and territorial consolidation was over, Akbar, too, turned to moral action as the true basis of power and authority in the country. It is not wholly fortuitous that the Mughal emperor took the initiative in proclaiming the doctrine of *Sul-i-Kul*, or "peace to all," during his reign.[20] Through formulating the principle that the communities of Islam, Hinduism, and other religions should live in harmony with each other, the emperor was seeking to create an overarching moral order to hold all his subjects, irrespective of their spiritual commitments, in the framework of a common polity. As Akbar ripened in years, he went beyond his original initiative by proclaiming a new spiritual worldview in the *Din-i-Ilahi*, or the "faith of God." In doing so, it is clear that Akbar was responding to a profound need of Indian society, which his sensitive intellect discerned with great clarity, at the same time as he sought to spiritualize politics in the subcontinent.

IV

As a liberation struggle of truly epic proportions gathered force in India in the closing decades of the nineteenth and the opening decades of the twentieth centuries, the tradition of the moral actor as the most effective instrument of praxis was articulated with great force in the political domain. During the initial stages, the leaders of the liberation movement relied substantially on the formal organization of modern political institutions in their confrontation with British imperialism. Indeed, it is not fortuitous that these leaders should initially have depended on novel political institutions to undermine the hold of the alien rulers of India. These leaders were acutely aware that the absence of a powerful state had been the bane of Indian society during past centuries. Indeed, the men who spearheaded the struggle for freedom fought for several objectives. First, they sought to overthrow the British Empire. Second, they strove to create a modern industrial society in order to provide the people with a life-style resting on material dignity and cultural creativity. However, the nationalist leaders believed that none of these objectives could be attained until the peoples and the territories of India had been drawn into a powerful state. The concept of representative politics, the ideology of nationalism, and the notion of a powerful state—all these were disseminated among the landed gentry and the professional and commercial classes in a relatively short span of time. They led to the formation in 1885 of the Indian National Congress, a party which, as suggested earlier, was meant to be a "parliament of Indian nationalism."[21]

In dwelling on the achievements of the nationalist leaders during the decades under review, it is also necessary to recall the shortcomings of the movement that they generated. The new consciousness of nationalism was originally confined to a very small section of the population, for outside the ranks of the landed gentry and the middle classes stood the great mass of the Indian people—peasants, artisans, industrial workers, tribals, and lumpen elements—very few of whom were drawn into the ideology or the activities of nationalism during the nineteenth century.

This is not to suggest that the popular classes were lacking in patriotism or that they were tied in bonds of affection to British imperialism. Quite the contrary. The regime of exploitation established by the British Raj affected them much more adversely then it affected the middle classes, which were for some time the beneficiaries of British rule. Indeed, the popular classes had repeatedly given expression to their anti-imperialism: once, in an overarching movement, namely, the uprising of 1857, also known as "the Indian mutiny," in which the peasants of the Ganges valley joined hands with their feudal overlords against the British; but more often in isolated movements like the Santhal upsurge of 1855, the Indigo uprising of 1860, and the Munda insurrection of 1900. But the anti-imperialism of the popular classes, apart from its localized or fragmented character, ran in a stream parallel to the nationalism of the landed gentry and the middle classes, organized after 1885 into the Indian National Congress, without flowing directly into that nationalism.[22]

The fusion of elite with popular anti-imperialism was the most formidable challenge facing the nationalist leadership of India at the turn of the century. There is reason to believe that from the outset a number of prominent nationalists were conscious of this challenge and its implications for the success of their struggle. But it took an outstanding actor like Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi—later to be canonized as a *mahatma*, or a "great soul"—to address himself squarely to this problem. It is not our intention to dwell here on the distinctive features of Gandhian ideology beyond referring to the fact that in *satyagraha* he fashioned a mode of social action not unknown to Indian society (although he applied this heritage to the political arena in an entirely novel way).[23] Nor do we propose to spend much time on the changes the Mahatma wrought within the Constitution and the structure of the Indian National Congress.

What needs to be highlighted here is the moral power that enabled Gandhi to reach out to tens upon millions of the "wretched of the Indian earth." As suggested by a scholar, Gandhi's extraordinary autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, was fashioned as a moral dialogue between the Mahatma and the people and spelled out the manner in which he had harnessed his spiritual powers.[24] Over and above ideology, organization, and the aspirations afloat among the popular classes, it was Gandhi's moral stature that enabled him to initiate countrywide protest movements of extraordinary social depth. Never was the tradition of moral exhortation as the true basis of social action within Indian society articulated more eloquently than in the crusade Gandhi launched against the British government. The result of this crusade—the attainment of independence in 1947—marks a new departure in the history of India.

V

As we survey the decades of the struggle for liberation, it becomes clear that despite the creation of novel political institutions, the strength of the moral actor in Indian society was powerfully reflected in the seminal position occupied by Mahatma Gandhi in the course of the nationalist movement. Allowing for changes in fashions of scholarly perception, this central reality about the liberation struggle, namely, the extent to which it hinged on the spiritual charisma of Mahatma Gandhi, is very well recognized in historical literature. But reflection on the argument that highlights the supposed breakdown of political institutions in the decades since 1947, an argument spelled out earlier in this essay, takes us to an altogether different phase of development within Indian society. The notion of the moral actor has, so I believe, not received the attention it deserves from scholars concerned with contemporary India, partly because of an emphasis on the formal and informal institutions thrown up through the crystallization of mass politics, but partly also because such scholars have not realized the relevance of this concept to Indian society after 1947.

It is, therefore, appropriate to examine the political experience of India since 1947 with reference to the issues raised above. It is also appropriate to dwell on the relationship between Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru in order to gain a full measure of the situation. From the very outset, it was clear to the Mahatma that notwithstanding the differences in outlook between him and Jawaharlal Nehru, the mantle of moral leadership would fall on Nehru, once he (Gandhi) had departed from the scene. Indeed, the results of the provincial elections of 1937 offered tangible proof of the strength of Nehru's charisma. True, at this juncture only 10 percent of the population was enfranchised. But whatever the size of the electorate (about 40 million), Nehru traveled across the length and breadth of the land in 1937, speaking to audiences drawn from the rural folk whose numbers could be measured only in hundreds of thousands.[25] It was during this campaign that Nehru's influence as a popular leader was demonstrated beyond the shadow of any doubt. Henceforth, although there were men far more powerful than Nehru in the Congress organization, his hold over the common people—a hold that rested on factors different from those which drew these classes to the Mahatma—was an essential ingredient of any victory for the Congress party at the polls. This realization conferred a strength on Nehru that was not necessarily reflected in the authority he controlled, at this juncture, within the party. It also set at rest doubts about who would lead the country once it was free.

The place occupied by an outstanding moral presence in the electoral process in India during the first decade and a half of the life of the infant republic is a theme on which scholars have reflected not at all. Yet this requires careful examination, particularly in view of the central space occupied by moral initiative and symbolic action, from the apex, in the recent history of the Indian polity.

But before we examine this, several issues need to be highlighted. It is rarely realized that the size of the electorate in India after the adoption of adult franchise in 1951 jumped approximately fivefold, from 40 million to about 200 million. This seems a mind-boggling increase when we dwell on the organizational effort needed to reach out to voters in such vast numbers. The first general elections held in 1952 were, therefore, a leap in the dark, since nobody knew how the newly enfranchised would cast their votes. Very little novel organizational effort was mounted by the Congress party to cope with the problems posed by so enormous a growth of the electorate. It is my contention that the situation was resolved through the pervasive moral influence exercised by Jawaharlal Nehru. It is also my belief that from the outset, general elections in India under conditions of adult franchise were like referenda. Massive electorates accepted or rejected prominent actors occupying a central position on the political stage. The utterances of such prominent actors rippled across the fabric of society and became a crucial factor in shaping the political preferences of different classes and communities. Furthermore, the response to the spoken word was shaped not so much by isolated citizens as by collective deliberation among men and women organized into those tens upon thousands of small kinship communities that constitute the living fabric of Indian society. In this specific sense, voting in India was (and remains even today) a species of collective behavior rather than the exercise of individual choice as visualized by liberal theory. Moreover, the relationships of subordination and superordination between different classes and communities at the grass roots are also factors that shape the political preferences of those kinship communities, whose members make up the mass electorate of the Indian polity. These relations have changed substantially over the past three or four decades. Hence the oft-repeated observation that the vote banks characterizing the electoral map till the late 1960s were no longer visible in general elections conducted after 1971. Nevertheless, the commanding place occupied by the moral actor in the Indian polity remained as distinctive a feature of the social and political domain after 1947 as it was during the course of the struggle for liberation, or in earlier centuries.

VI

Perhaps this argument is clearly reflected in the results of the general elections that have been held in India since 1947. With the exception of 1967, all these elections produced workable majorities for one party or another within the *Lok Sabha*, or the lower house of the Parliament. In political commentaries, it is usually observed that the elections of 1971 and the general elections held since that year have been characterized by "waves" for or against some outstanding leader. It is my contention that the elections held before 1967, too, were characterized by similar phenomena. However, the presence of

Jawaharlal Nehru was so dominating a feature at this stage that political commentators did not seize on the notion of a wave to describe the electoral process. In this context, as already suggested, the elections of 1967 stand out as an exception because no single leader emerged as a dominating presence in the course of this year. It may also be observed that relations among the primary social groups, which make up the fabric of Indian society and which react to exhortations and political initiatives on the part of moral actors, may well have changed substantially during the past four decades. The point worth stressing, however, is the continuing importance of moral action in politics, just as it is also necessary to stress the significance of the dominating leader who is capable of influencing the electorate on a monumental scale.

If such an argument has any validity, then some logical consequences need to be spelled out in the context of the widespread belief in the decay of political institutions, which has gained currency in scholarly as well as journalistic circles. My argument partly rests on the hypothesis that the level of political institutionalization during the course of the liberation struggle, too, was more modest than generally assumed, notwithstanding the nationalist objective of creating such institutionalization as the principal instrument behind the nation-state and the transformation from an agricultural to an industrial society. Even during the decades of the anti-imperialist struggle, the tradition of social initiative on the part of heroic individuals, who had transcended secular constraints and built up for themselves substantial moral capital, was eloquently reflected in the person of the Mahatma. Perhaps at a less heroic level, this tradition of personalized politics at the apex, and the extraordinary influence of individual actors on collective political behavior, was also at work in the post-1947 decades. The transplantation of such a tradition of social action into the novel domain of representative politics may not be the best way of resolving the problems of popular participation in politics within a liberal democracy. Yet such a perception of the polity in India today, which draws heavily on the continuing vitality of certain powerful historical traditions, goes some way toward providing an understanding of the striking record of representative institutions and liberal democracy in India.

At the beginning of this essay, I suggested that the seminal process in India in our times was the transformation of an agricultural into an industrial society, with related changes in social values and political institutions. The creation in a country of institutions that facilitate popular participation in politics is a crucial constituent of the industrial transformation. Wherever societies have undergone such a change, whether through the capitalist or the socialist path, the involvement of the popular classes in social production and political decisions has been essential to the success of industrialization at minimal social cost. In India the industrial transformation is being attempted—so far as the polity is concerned—through certain traditions of moral initiative and political behavior that have been characteristic of its civilization over the ages. Whether such adaptation of historical traditions will meet the requirements of the situation is a question to which there is no easy answer. Yet the creative capacity of the people of India, which has served them well over the past few decades, will surely rise to the challenge of creating a new society in which their material as well as their cultural potential is realized to the fullest.

ENDNOTES

[1] The classic comparative study of the differential development of industrial societies is Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin, 1967).

[2] Maurice Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1946).

[3] This argument is brilliantly expressed in E. H. Carr, *What is History?* (London: Macmillan, 1961).

[4] For two ideologically polar statements of this perception, see James Hill, *The History of British India*, vol. 1, book 2 and vol. 2 (London: James Madden, and Piper, Stephenson and Spence, 1858); and Karl Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*, trans. J. Cohen, ed. Eric Hobsbown (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1964).

[5] Bipan Chandra, "Karl Marx, His Theories of Asian Societies and Colonial Rule," *Review* 5 (1) (Summer 1981):13–91.

[6] Ravinder Kumar, "Introduction," in *Myth and Reality: The Struggle for Freedom in India (1945–47)*, ed. A. K. Gupta (New Delhi: Manohar Publications, 1987). Also see the special issue of *Seminar* 329 (January 1987).

[7] We are indebted to B. Cohn for this idea. See "The British in Benares," in *An Anthropologist among the Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[8] G. M. Beckmann, *The Modernization of China and Japan* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 28–32.

[9] R. Inden, "The Hindu Chiefdom in Middle Bengali Literature," in *Bengal Literature and History*, ed. E. C. Dimock (East Lansing, Mich.: Asian Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1967).

[10] For a recent study of this theme, see A. H. Khan, *Chieftains in the Mughal Empire* (Simla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1977).

[11] This has been represented in, among others, Athar Ali, *The Mughal Nobility under Aurangzeb* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1966).

[12] The formation of regional polities in the eighteenth century has been analyzed with great sensitivity by C. A. Bayly in Rulers, *Townsmen and Bazaars* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). Also by S. Nurul Hasan in *Thoughts on Agrarian Relations in Mughal India* (New Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1973).

[13] M. N. Sriniwas, *Caste in Modern India and other Essays* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1962), particularly the essay entitled "Varna and Caste."

[14] For this particular interpretation of the Hindu Social System, see L. Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus, An Essay on the Caste System* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970).

[15] This argument is to be found in any of the standard histories of Hindu philosophy. See S. Radhakrishnan, *Indian Philosophy* (New York: Macmillan, 1923).

[16] Robert Redfield, *The Little Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955).

[17] J. C. Heesterman, *Inner Conflict of Tradition: Essays in Indian Ritual, Kingship and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

[18] A seminal essay which stated this insight is L. Dumont's contribution entitled "World Renunciation in Indian Religions," in *Contributions to Indian Sociology*, vol. 4 (Paris and The Hague: Mouton, 1960), 33–62. Since then, this notion has been commented on at considerable length by various scholars. See, for instance, *Contributions to Indian Sociology, New Series*, vol. 15, nos. 1 and 2 (New Delhi: Vikas Publications, 1981).

[19] Romila Thapar, *Asoka and the Decline of the Mauryas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).

[20] Shri Ram Sharma, *The Religious Policy of the Mughal Emperors* (London: Asia Publishing House, 1962) and M. Roychaudhuri, *The State and Religion in Mughal India* (Calcutta: Indian Publicity Society, 1951).

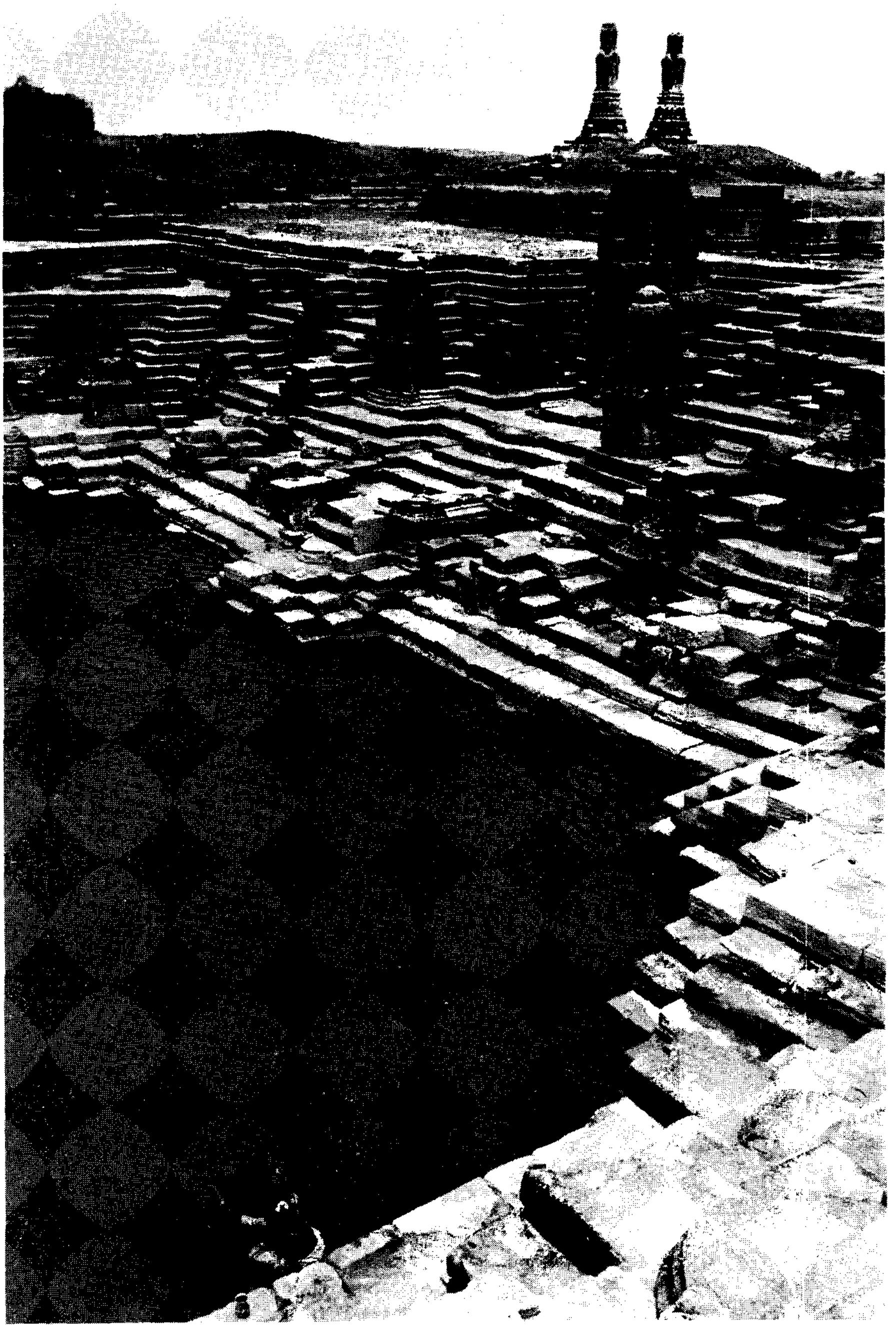
[21] For an authoritative account of this theme, see S. R. Mehrotra, *The Emergence of the Indian National Congress* (New Delhi: Vikas, 1971).

[22] Ranjit Guha, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[23] A. L. Basham, "Traditional Influences on the Thought of Mahatma Gandhi," in *Essays on Gandhian Poltics*, ed. R. Kumar (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 17–42.

[24] This argument is fully developed in L. I. and S. H. Rudolph, *The Modernity of Tradition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967). See in particular the essay entitled "The Traditional Roots of Charisma: Gandhi" in this book.

[25] *The Selected Works of Jawaharlal Nehru*, ed. S. Gopal, vol. 7 (New Delhi: Orient Longman, 1975), which deals with Nehru's electioneering during the 1936–1937 elections.



The Indian Enterprise Today

Rajni Kothari

After Independence, India's hydroelectric dams—erected as they were to a secular faith—came to be known as Nehru's "new temples." Such projects were to ensure India's future. Today, many recognize that the wings of modernity were not powerful enough to bear the huge nation aloft. Custom still regulates life. Agricultural cycles still determine national production. Village elders still check the administrations of bureaucrats. Moreover, ancient India has found political proponents of its own. Popular campaigns are waged to protect tribal communities and primeval forests from the encroachments of development. Traditionalists have countered the modernizers with their own Enlightenment.

When I speak of *the Indian enterprise*, I have in mind first the whole project called India. This is not this or that Indian enterprise, not the governmental enterprise, or the enterprise called economic planning, or some cultural endeavor like literature or cinema, or even the effort to launch some movement of social change. It is an attempt to comprehend the whole of the entity called India.

Second, I am concerned with the Indian enterprise today, as it is currently engaged and unfolding, not as it was when India began its career as an independent nation-state and gave itself a constitution and set forth on a journey into the future, on its "tryst with destiny," as

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Jawaharlal Nehru put it in 1947. I mean, rather, the enterprise as it is now, more than forty years after Independence—when, following a period of both stability and orderly change, things have begun to go wrong and when the enterprise has the challenge of reassessing its major contours and of restructuring (as well as redefining) its basic dimensions and thrust. At any rate, that is how the situation looks to me.

Third, the enterprise I am trying to see in layout is not the one that has already become but one that is becoming, not something that has been laid out on the grounds and institutionalized and made into a going concern, where the task is to simply keep going, despite some problems of change and transition, into another generation of statehood or nationhood. It is, rather, something still happening and in some ways happening anew, because of new stirrings and turmoil caused by new spurts of consciousness and awakening, new pressures that are emanating from various sources, new voices that are struggling to be heard. It is not a Sweden or a Japan that I am trying to describe; it is India—still in the throes of change and transformation. What I am trying to do, then, is to comprehend an ancient, continuing entity in its current unfolding in the face of myriad challenges and contrary pulls. It is an attempt to understand and unravel not just what the entity is about but how precisely it is an endeavor (either by design or by drift) to become something in a highly uncertain world.

I am thinking of that entity as a single enterprise, in all its thrusts and counterthrusts, its new expressions in an endogenous search and sweep for identity (including both its past legacies and its present efforts at change and transformation), and its reactions to the exogenous forces reinforcing it or seeking to deflect it from its main course. I am aware that such an attempt could be dismissed by some who are steeped in specialized disciplines as an impossible task and that at any rate it is bound to be not just provocative but controversial. This opinion does not worry or deter me. If anything, it acts as a spur. Let me proceed.

What then is the Indian enterprise today like? According to the dominant view, it is the building of a strong and viable center, in the form of a nation-state, to overcome a legacy of fragmentation and divisiveness, an attempt to modernize a traditional society and democratize an inherently unequal and nonegalitarian social order, an enterprise of meeting the "Western challenge" (which in a way for the first time made Indians self-conscious) by accepting innovations brought by modern science and technology, by a centralized state and a secular ideology.

I happen to hold that the Indian enterprise is all this but not just this. It is also something altogether different and rather distinctive. It is an enterprise that scales opposite pulls and thrusts in a creative encounter between apparent dichotomies, that makes the most of the Indian genius for tolerance and use of ambiguities and contradictions. It is an enterprise that injects through such an encounter a regenerative consciousness on several layers of both indigenous and new thresholds, releasing in the process new actors, new agendas, and new and hitherto submerged voices, generating a new language of both self-understanding and societal understanding. Seen in this way, it becomes an enterprise in which a dormant civilization is coming alive through a wholly new process of consciousness and communication, and for that purpose, using the instrumentalities of state, technology, and secular power. It recaptures and reinterprets the old in an effort to come to terms with but also reinterpret and transform the new. It does not exclude "the other," be it the large repertoire of its various pasts and its various locales or the new and equally large repertoire of infusions from "the outside"—the various outsides. It is both eclectic and agglomerative (not aggregative, as in Western democratic practice) and highly selective and reticent when it comes to things that continue to remain alien to and disruptive of its authentic self. It is an enterprise that is rooted in the past but unfolding in the present and that looks toward and anticipates an uncertain future in an attempt to perceive and absorb it into something that is livable and worthwhile. The enterprise is not a simple mixture of the old and the new, not even a reconciliation of tradition and modernity in some synthetic product, not several centuries coexisting in some form of parallel formations and/or leftovers but something altogether different from everything else. At the same time it is something not imposed from either outside or "up there."

The enterprise is a search for an alternative course for India, an alternative to something that was implanted and tried out at one time but that didn't work, that turned sour and became a source of domination and destruction and alienation. But it is not an alternative in terms of another abstract universal, some kind of "paradigm shift" in both theory and practice, something to be achieved in some distant future on the basis of some utopian vision. In India it is, rather, something to be churned out from a long history encompassing many diversities—the living past (much of it still around), the attempted present, and the emergent tomorrows. This is the difference between the postmodern dream of proponents of alternatives in the West and a perspective that transforms without either annihilating or even disowning tradition or turning the back wholly on the modern.[1]

The point is that the "modern" enterprise is taken seriously in India by both the elites and the common people—in some ways by the latter more seriously than by the former, with greater faith in its capacity to liberate itself from the fossilized accretions and anachronisms (as well as the sterilities) of the past—but this enterprise is found out not to have worked and, according to some, not to be worth pursuing any longer. And yet from the very experience and expectations generated by this experiment, from the very faith in it, have sprung forth new awakenings and aspirations, struggles based on these, and perhaps new possibilities.

The crucial point is that the Indian enterprise today is not the same as what started after Independence in 1947, the launching of the republic in 1950, and the years that followed, often characterized as "the Nehru years." Today, ironically, Nehru, the very pacesetter of modern India, sounds like a distant voice in the background, still strong no doubt but increasingly a resonance that sounds remote and abstract. For one thing, there is a drastically changed meaning of India's key concepts and values. What was the stability of the system and the security of large masses, for instance, is today the security of a narrow and increasingly narrowing elite. What started as the modernization of a whole society, taking large masses of the people in its sweep, based on a negotiated consciousness across social structures and thresholds, has been reduced to modernization of the already modern, the socially malleable, and the ready-to-be co-opted, excluding the rest, building a structure of ins and outs. From involving diverse communities and religio-ethnic-linguistic affiliations in a framework of eclectic secularism, the Indian ruling elite has moved to a concept of secularism in which a homogenizing state is striving to create a homogenous society, undermining all pluralities and imposing one overarching secular thrust defined by a centralized regime and a centralized system. In each case, both the meaning system and the operational contours have changed.

Concepts like nation building have failed to prevent—and have often led to—polarizations that have produced one major divide across which it is becoming increasingly difficult to communicate, coperceive, be sensitive. A peculiar ethos of language and communication is developing in this "two-world" scenario.[2]

It is against this overturning of both meaning systems and operational contours and institutions that the new churnings have to be perceived and understood. The point is that even if the new voices are still both not loud enough and too hesitant, no thinking about the future that does not include them, draw upon their implied and explicit articulations, and resonate the whole through their assertions and solidarities can be of much use. And, on the other hand, the more established and crystallized voices, and the organized entities from which they emerge and speak forth, which one has got so used to hearing, may be already becoming less and less relevant and significant when it comes to determining the future course of this ancient land.

There is, then, this as yet undecided encounter—between the forces of absorption in the civilizational mold on the one hand and co-optation within the dominant and in many ways alien framework imposed from above on the other, with strong embeddedness of powerful interests appearing to stem the new churnings and stirrings from the lower reaches of the whole society, frustrating them and often dividing and confusing them. Yet, there is a distinct texturing of new possibilities, based on local and intermediate levels gaining ascendancy, with the higher levels proving increasingly incapable of managing things.

Both the scenario of growing polarization, declining communication across the divide, the building of impregnable walls of quarantine, and the pushing back of those knocking at the doors and the scenario of strong challenges from the bottom, new consciousness of rights, and effective injection of newness and insecurity in dominant circles are real. Who will win out is not clear. Perhaps no one will. It will all depend on the nature of "the new dialogue"—and the new institutional and ideological framework of that dialogue. It seems to me that this framework will be increasingly decided by the ground forces, by the people rather than their representatives, by the professional supporters of countervailing forces, all of this aided by a changing structure of national and international structures and resources. In the process the very institutions of the state, technology, and development will undergo change. Not readily of course, but under new compulsions provided by both demonstrated failures of the system and emergent alternatives to it. As this change occurs, significant segments within the scientific and professional circles may also come forward and join forces. And with their joining, the already growing voices and stirrings of consciousness from the humanities and the arts will make themselves felt closer to center stage, from which they have been marginalized for so long.

As they move into the light, traditional institutions—Westminster-style democracy, Keynesian economics, state-led centralized planning, most of which are performing less and less anyway—will be forced to readjust to the new churnings and stirrings, the new challenges and encounters, the new actors and agendas represented by the new professionals and the now more confident voices from both the folk cultures and the creative arts and humanities. For long these latter layers of the Indian landscape have been effectively depoliticized and taken out of the mainstream of public discourse; for too long they have been either reduced to instruments of cheap entertainment (*melas* and festivals and tableaus in Republic Day parades) for the elite and for foreigners or elevated to being honored sycophants of the rulers through state patronage, dished out increasingly to less and less independent individuals and groups. And yet in India it is these folk cultures and creative writers and artists and chroniclers of people's collective strivings and joys and pangs that have provided its more authentic expressions and language. The perceptions and understandings of the folk and their cultures, the practices and articulate voices of peasant communities, and the live throbbings and ancestral heritages of tribal and hill peoples, as well as the both received and constantly improvised wisdom of old women and their menfolk have provided the real voices, and they continue to provide the same in the large land masses of today's India. They lie submerged and have often been made dormant under colonial and colonizing impacts of aliens from both abroad and within India (the nonresident Indians—the NRIs—as well as the resident non-Indians, in the inimitable words of my colleague D. L. Sheth).

All along, India has harbored enormous versatility of skill and ingenuity—both through prolonged continuity and through ever new acquisition—as well as an array of absolutely brilliant individuals. In one way these individuals have appeared in unconventional and deviant forms but have at the same time in other ways been highly constructive, giving, and other-oriented. What is more, they have always operated from within groups and communities, with highly schematized institutional structures no doubt, but at the same time open (and relaxed) with respect to less structured processes of dialogue, disputations, and constructions emerging from the dialogue. A very large spread of such individuals and institutional entities has been there in the past and is there today too, not just in the form of castes and village networks to which individuals belong by virtue of their birth and location but also in the form of a whole series of voluntaristic bodies through which a variety of interests and affiliations—and individual creativity—is expressed.

Spiritually, there is the great urge to reach for an individualistic ethos: the ultimate end is to be freed from worldly obligations and the cycle of birth and death. But there is an equally great accent on belongingness—on *dharma*, not just in terms of duties enshrined according to one's birth and station in life but also in terms of obligations to a whole variety of fellow beings as well as to larger and more abstract social entities. Indeed, what sets India apart in terms of perception of the human element is that in it the individual is at once seeking liberation and seeking community. Hence the far greater relevance of the language of humanities and aesthetics, which evoke affinities and sensitize one to issues of good and evil, than of the sciences, which only depict and explain reality and that in too precise and specialized a way to lend it to human intervention. Equally clear is the Indian affinity for nonhuman species, other forms of life, even inanimate entities—in short, to nature and its endless mysteries. This too is captured much better in the language of humanities and of the folk than in the language of science and of the centralized state.

All this has of course been pushed somewhat into the background in the long and brutal—and brutalizing—march of the global, the universal, the centralizing, and the scientific civilization. But all has by no means been conquered, far less vanquished. It is, after forty years of tutelage to an alien framework of centralized governance and monopolized power structures, beginning to reassert itself. This is taking a vast variety of forms—struggles for tribal rights and preservation of valued life-styles, assertion of peasant communities against urban industrial colonizations, demands for autonomous ethnic and national "homelands." There is growing realization that people will have to recover their own forgotten know-how and technical skills and cultural endowments for recovering nature on their side instead of relying on the state, which has, by building huge dams and taking on other gigantic projects—Nehru's "new temples"—only deprived the "locals" of their means of sustenance and livelihood.

These locals have yet to coalesce into effective interest groups, and there is still a long way to go before various constituents representing the new voices will be able to see beyond their immediate concerns and disillusionments to an alternative way to organize life in society on the basis of a new theory. The new system should allow both negative protest against wrongs and search for positive alternatives, conceptions of justice based on everyone having more of what others have as well as a just and humane order based on new and fresh thinking. A just and humane order may well come about as people look beyond immediate disasters and deprivations. But it may not, given the capacity of the "system" to confuse issues and carry on. And yet there is little doubt that the essential Indian enterprise cannot be adequately understood without taking these issues into account. While I regard recovery of some aspects of people's accumulated wisdom as necessary to any search for both authenticity and functional relevance, the main endeavor that I see the emergent forces engaged in is essentially transformative.

Crucial to this transformation is the democratic revolution, in which large parts of the Indian phenomenon are involved. Indeed, in one way or another almost the whole of India is involved in a democratic churning, which affects the social fabric, the institutions of the state (despite many erosions and letdowns), and both political and economic as well as cultural and ethical ferment. This ferment has changed the criteria of perception and affect, of appraisal and affliction. The traditional criteria of status based on one's birth and station in life, veneration of age and antiquity, and location of the self in a hierarchy sanctioned by hallowed usage are still there and do get used from time to time, but they are clearly on the decline and have given way to new criteria of status and respect, new responsibilities and strivings. It is a revolution of a very different kind from the

French or the Russian or the Chinese, for it entails nothing so drastic and undermining of entire social structures. It is something much slower, more low-key and continuous, often drawing on memories of earlier challenges to hegemonic structures. It is cumulative and absorbent of upsets and backlashes that have been of late occurring in rather disturbing ways. In many ways it is an irreversible revolution in values and perceptions, in meaning systems, decisive in its transformation of traditional social strivings, for it is more basic than many of the more celebrated and dramatized revolutions. (Many of them are today felt to be betrayed.)

Socially, the revolution involves the creation of a new majority (if one must speak in terms of majorities and minorities) based on an agglomeration of the traditionally deprived and dispossessed, including a large series of peripheries and minorities as defined in both traditional and more modern electoral and communal terms. This new majority is still in the making[3] and has recently been threatened with dislodging from the Indian imagination by the rise of chauvinist tendencies and exclusivist claims to legitimacy in respect to the access to state power of a few upper-caste Hindus speaking for "the Hindu majority" (a total misconception of Hinduism). I have no doubt that this collision between a majority based on a powerful upswing of long-term transformation and an artificial and concocted majority brought up by counterrevolutionary forces will come to pass, though only after long struggle and not a little violence and show of raw might and social perversity.

The broad thrust of this democratic transformation is quite clear and unambiguous. Its real test came during the Indian Emergency in 1975–1976 when both the norm setters (the intellectuals and opinion makers) and the people demonstrated beyond doubt their preference for democratic values and assertions. After that, even the facile Marxist critique of democracy as a bourgeois luxury was completely disabused and *democracy* ceased to be a dirty word in the lexicon of the so-called radicals. The liberals too learned the lesson that democracy did not consist of mere change of elites and governments on the basis of electoral games but went to the heart of the condition of the people themselves (on which the Marxists had always laid stress). And there emerged a new and resounding consensus about the value of democracy in the process of social transformation. Today, whether this transformation be the violent overthrow of a class enemy as advocated by the Marxist-Leninists (the Naxalites), or the reformist rejuvenation of prevailing social structures as found in a spate of efforts taking place within the Hindu, the Muslim, and the Sikh fold, or the extremist and even terrorist uprisings on both the Left and the Right, the one watchword by which they all swear is *democracy*.

This then is the crux of the Indian enterprise today, set in the comprehensive and eclectic civilizational mold laid out in the early pages of this article. At this stage some caveats are in order. First, to the extent that the democratic enterprise depends on struggles and churnings from below while those at the top feel insecure and inhibited in the face of such challenge, isn't there a danger that political institutions—namely, the state, the political parties, the legislatures, and the judiciary—will become alienated from the mainstream? Unless the mainstream institutions are able to take in the new upsurges as important inputs to their own thinking and functioning, isn't there further danger of the new stirrings at the bottom becoming isolated and fragmented and in the end not making much headway when it comes to the operation of the larger system? Second, as alienation of the mainstream from the grass roots and of the grass roots from the mainstream grows, it is likely that a climate of confrontation will develop, that frustration will set in and the possibility of any meaningful dialogue recede. The resulting vacuum would be filled by increasing violence, based on the one hand on a state of despair and anomie among the deprived and oppressed, and on the other hand on organized efforts by determined groups bent on striking terror into the people. As this happens, the whole arena of "movements" will get drawn into the vortex of violence and its increasingly professional use. In recent years there has been a phenomenal growth of violence in India encompassing both state terrorism and vandalism by the agents of the state as well as terrorism "from below."

As terrorism grows, there also takes place a considerable growth in social violence, between individuals, among the lower classes, within the deprived communities, some of which are drawn into crime as a way of living as well as livelihood. In short, unless the democratic struggles emerging from the grass roots are able to inspire new thinking and reconstructed agendas within the mainstream, unless the movement for alternatives is to some extent also reflected in the mainstream opponents of the established regime, there is every likelihood that the agents of violence will prove destabilizing for the forces of change. In the meanwhile the establishment is likely to lean more and more on chauvinist backlash against opposition of all kinds and on global technocratic solutions that are based on exclusion of large segments of the population from the purview of the state and the development process. There is a strange kind of populism emerging from the technological promise of the twenty-first century, the slow discrediting of the state as an institution and the new promise of privatization that will open up new vistas for whoever wants to move into the growing vacuum and take charge. The competitive ethos involved in this emergence can, through the growing power of the mass media, particularly television, influence the minds of the ordinary people too. In fact, that is how the technocratic elite would present democracy to the people—it would implore them to come out of their passivity and move ahead, leaving the others behind.

This accent on competition provides a totally different rationale for democracy than the ideal of the decades after the Indian Constitution was inaugurated. Unless the democratic spirit is once again rekindled—not just at the bottom but also in the middle and upper reaches of the system—there is every likelihood that democracy itself will become a battleground rather than provide a framework of consensus, as was the case during the so-called Nehru era. To put the whole thing differently, the democratic process on which the Indian enterprise today hinges has entered a new phase. The initiators and bearers of the democratic process are not what they were when the much talked of "Indian experiment" began. They are not the old liberal bourgeoisie, which was theoretically supposed to be the backbone of democratic institutions; it seems to have lost faith in the parliamentary model and to be scared of the growing populist pressures on it. They are not the old-fashioned nationalists who put so much store in a model of nation building that could draw diverse social strands into the great excitement of creating one united India; today the nationalists have fallen prey to the psychosis of thinking that the country is in danger and are accepting new doctrines of stability and security that make the Indian nation increasingly exclusive and leave a whole lot of segments stranded, and in fact considered dangerous and hence dispensable.

Similarly, it is not the earlier kind of supporters from abroad, from the Western democracies, who were keen on seeing the largest democracy in the world succeed; driven by their own changed set of global priorities, and scared of the ground swell of popular upsurge and economic demands round the world, these countries are far more keen on selling ideas of liberalization and privatization and on protecting their growing capital investments. They want easy access to markets for technologies and to hinterlands and forests for the produce of nature, to a new system of internal and external security and the models of surveillance and intelligence that go with it.

And it is not the Indian state that is supposed to be an agent of egalitarian reordering of an unequal social order; the state today is increasingly becoming an agent of both the new ideology of privatization and the new ideology of a national security state, which often degenerates into a personal security state whose resources are disproportionately devoted to the security and safety of a few, including the security of their various jaunts and retreats and festivals. Increasingly, the responsibility of carrying on the democratic process is falling to the people who are becoming targets of all these distortions and perversities and fears and insecurities—namely, the very poor and deprived masses at the grass roots and their mobilizers and catalysts, of whom the elite seem to be getting wary lest the turmoil from the bottom upset the too finely and fragiley poised applecart.[4]

But, as the poor and the deprived and their catalysts prepare to keep their democratic struggles going, they are faced with the challenge of rethinking political agendas, reconceptualizing the critical locations of democratic spaces, and revising their earlier notions of what the Indian state and its democratic supporters abroad (through aid and transfers) can in fact do. As such rethinking proceeds—evidence is growing that this is proceeding apace and in several locations quickening—new thresholds of democratic action are likely to take shape. They will be based on opening new spaces in civil society rather than within the framework of the state, on fending for oneself and one's community, on asserting the rights of communities and regions and ethnic identities, on internal restructuring and reform by expanding the role for women, for local society's own monitors, and even for a new genre of protectors and militants, who will provide new modes and levels of regard and honor and dignity. A revolution of rights is on the upswing and becoming central to the democratic enterprise—rights regarding health and nutrition, environment and women, housing and shelter, destitute children, homelands for tribal and hill people, access to water and land and village commons and fuel, and, above all, the rights of millions of people displaced, unemployed, and ravaged by "development projects."

A wholly new agenda of concerns and claims is on the anvil. And it is being propelled into the democratic spaces of both civil society and the state by a wholly new set of actors and organizations. I have been witness to the new phenomenon of the people concluding that "nothing will happen out there" and that "*we* will have to do it," both by large assertions of popular will vis-à-vis the apparatus of the state and by relying on processes of self-help and self-determination, unfortunately also being forced to acquire fire power to make their collective wills resonate and become effective. There is a lot of raw protest and bluntness in these assertions, a large dose of effrontery, a lot of anger, not a little contempt for the rulers, but also a large measure of a new confidence of the "we shall prevail" kind. Underlying it all is not just a new understanding of democratic self-assertion but also a new language through which to communicate democratic self-assertion. It is a language that neither the investigative journalist nor the NGO-style activist would readily understand, much less the academic specialist and the member of Parliament who is supposed to be a representative of the people. It is a language that the new India will ignore at its peril.

These voices from below are the new green shoots of the democratic enterprise. That they behave in a certain manner should not surprise us. After all, there have been just too much humiliation and hurt and hackle in the system; too many women raped in police stations; too much forced prostitution and hot terror being thrust onto women and children; too much discrimination and dishonesty in the running of institutions that lead to suicide, often of the highly gifted and qualified. The decline of democracy of the Nehruvian variety has ushered in a real breakdown of both norms and structures, an unbelievable swing and sway of corrupt practices that have put an end to all accountability and produced an atmosphere of normative breakdown and a free-for-all. Under these conditions the various struggles for democracy have of necessity to be waged in unconventional ways, often affecting finer balances of constitutional government and reinforcing confrontational postures on all sides.

The democratic enterprise in India is still quite fragile and vulnerable to both internal and external disturbances, despite deeply ingrained commitments and resiliences. There is an air of instability arising out of a considerable weakening of institutional safeguards against misuse of power and authority and a continuing infliction of injustice on large masses of the people. There is a growing sense of injustice and of misuse of power and privilege.

The only reassuring thing is that all this is being increasingly realized, and realized at all levels, including the higher reaches of the operating system and the sensitive segments of the elite. Party politicians, bureaucrats, professionals belonging to various sciences seem to become concerned and anxious (even though they are still few in number). There is also evidence of new understanding and the growth of a slowly crystallizing consensus on issues on which till very recently there was wide disagreement—on the need for decentralization, electoral reforms, participation and empowerment of the peripheries, a renewed stress on employment generation and poverty alleviation. There is still much disagreement over the means to satisfy these needs—all the way from high tech and homogenizing solutions to more Gandhian, pluralistic, and dispersed forms of rural resurgence. But there is agreement on the need to restructure the apparatus of power and the framework of authority.

I am convinced that the only lasting transformation from micro struggles for alternatives to macro formations that provide feasible transitions to a national democratic crystallization will have to come through the growth of a federalized and decentralized political framework. This is indicated not only by the considerable shift that has already been achieved from a centralized to a more federal political structure over the last few years (with so many non-Congress governments in office, many of them willing to decentralize the political process further down) but also by the more basic shifts that are in evidence from a state-centered process of social transformation to one that opens up spaces in civil society, from treating people as objects of elite benevolence to treating them as subjects who should directly decide their own destinies. All of this draws on the Indian cultural proclivity for a diverse and pluralistic structure of democracy.[5]

Such consensus, still very slow in emerging and pitched against many contrary pulls, is being reinforced by one overriding realization—that we are dealing with a society bedeviled by the persistence of the curse of poverty but also one in which the sources of exclusion are not just between the rich and the poor, not just class-based, but also along many other dimensions of exclusion: gender, ethnicity, the future generations, nature. Hence the great significance of the democratic enterprise in India's contemporary attempt to regain its identity. The India of the excluders wants to fly into the twenty-first century alone, without "the other India." This they consider dispensable, but so is their view of India as a civilization. Their view is based on a techno-managerial vision, imbibed from the postmodern West, without either historical antecedents or cultural roots, that reduces living cultures to dead exhibits (à la the Festival of India).

The point is that this enterprise of the excluders and the exhibitors is not the Indian enterprise. It is an alien enterprise, undertaken by local aliens,[6] inspired by alien influences, and supported by nonresident Indians.

It is the struggles of those who are excluded and the concerns of those who recognize their condition that constitute the Indian enterprise—an enterprise that is at once a continuation of the Indian Constitution promulgated in 1950 and an effort to keep alive an ancient civilization and its ethical, ecological, and cultural fabric. This is an effort to keep the good alive in the fashion of a new assertion of will against today's predators; to keep the native *mahua* and *sal* trees alive, but to resist the alien eucalyptus; to keep the rivers alive and resist the dams; to keep the folk and tribal cultures alive and resist their museumized and fossilized forms; and with this, to revive the respect for the humanities and the arts, which have been pushed off center stage by the rise of positivist science; to revive the regard for wisdom and insight, which have been pushed out by the stress on professionalism and expertise.

Seen in this way, the contemporary democratic enterprise is also an enterprise of civilizational continuity in the context of a world in transformation. Indeed, the anguished craving of this large civilization based on a plurality of cultures and their togetherness (a distinctively Indian concept) to survive in the face of both excluding and homogenizing tendencies is part of today's Indian enterprise. It is an enterprise of pluralist recovery of the rights of so many that are oppressed and marginalized but one that also builds on the lasting and conserving elements of an ancient land as against the dispensability and obsolescence that are built into the colonizing project of both the modern Indian state and the global enterprise of integrating that state by colonizing it. The democratic enterprise in which the Indian people are involved must resist both.

Finally, this Indian enterprise is based on a distinctive conception of humanism—refusing to be obsessed by the atomized conception of the self, transcending anthropomorphism, creating in the human the capacity to be one with nonhuman species and with creation as a whole, and on that deeper naturalistic conception, generating the ability to identify with "the other" and to respect the rights of others as a basis of a humane civilization. It is in this distinctive conception of a humanistic civilization that the contemporary enterprise of democratic rejuvenation needs to be located. But this can only happen if the accumulated froth and perversities are also resisted and fought against as an essential part of the enterprise. Both the recovery of the Indianness of India (as against the dominance of alien structures and ideologies) and the inclusion of those that have been excluded by both tradition and modernity as essential to that Indianness is what the Indian enterprise is about.[7]

ENDNOTES

[1] In arriving at this formulation, I have drawn on Ashis Nandy's intervention at the planning meeting for this *Daedalus* issue, held at Cochin on 3–7 January 1987.

[2] See "The Phenomenon of Two Indias," in my book *State Against Democracy: In Search of Humane Governance* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1988); "Flight into the 21st Century: Millions Will Be Stranded," *Times of India*, 27 April 1987; and "Bridging the Two Worlds," in *Transformation and Survival: In Search of Humane World Order* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1988).

[3] Of all people Mrs. Gandhi understood the meaning of the new majority the best (defined by political analysts as her "winning coalition") until her insecurities got the better of her insights and her craving for somehow hanging on to state power became more important than her original urge to emerge as a leader of the Indian masses. Her two sons led her up the garden path too, disabusing her of her commitment to socialism, secularism, and a positive state. For a fuller appraisal of Indira Gandhi's role, see my "Integration and Exclusion in Indian Politics" in my book *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India* (New Delhi: Ajanta, 1989), also published in *Economic and Political Weekly* 23 (43) (22 October 1988).

[4] On all this, see the materials put out by Lokayan, an organization of intellectuals and social activists in India (13 Alipur Road, Delhi 110 054, India). See also the

series of articles on the nonparty political process in the *Economic and Political Weekly*, by Harsh Sethi, "Groups in a New Politics of Transformation," 18 February 1984; by D. L. Sheth, "Grassroots Initiatives in India," 11 February 1984; and by me, "Masses, Classes and the State," 1 February 1986, and "The Non-Party Political Process," 4 February 1984. The various themes explored in these paragraphs are more fully dealt with in my book *State Against Democracy.*

[5] On the argument that there have been important cultural and institutional strains in India that have facilitated the acceptance and spread of a democratic polity, see my article, "Why Has India Been Democratic?" in *State Against Democracy* (New Delhi, Ajanta, 1988).

[6] On this theme, see my "New Generation," *Seminar* (January 1986) and "Whose India?" *Seminar* (January 1987).

[7] A suggestion was made at the conference for this issue in April 1988 that I should provide a glimpse of my own intellectual journey in understanding the Indian model of development, for I have changed my position substantially. I find this difficult to do in this article in any manner except inferentially. Those aware of my earlier works will of course recognize the shifts that have taken place in my position. Moreover, I have described the changes in two chapters entitled "Introduction: Changing Perspective on Indian Politics" and "Reminiscences and Reflections" in my book *Politics and the People: In Search of a Humane India*, vol. 1. See also Thomas Pantham's recent review of both my work and critiques thereof, "Interpreting Indian Politics: Rajni Kothari and His Critics," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 22 (2) (July-December 1988):229–46.

Freedom to Cartoon, Freedom to Speak

R. K. Laxman

Only a political cartoonist would fear utopia: what subject would that leave for his art? Political cartooning has, however, survived for fifty years in changing India, through the sharp tongues and pencils of its inceptors. During the Emergency of Mrs. Gandhi's reign, censors blitzed cartoons causing chuckles as well as those inducing silence. That situation provides a perfect description of the irony in everyday life that the political cartoonist attempts to convey. While always political, India's cartoon characters satirize without shrill calls to action. They provide the relief that comes with hearing one's humor and hope voiced publicly.

The art of cartooning is alien to the Orient, although satire in verse, prose, and drama has flourished in this part of the world from time immemorial. In the early days folk songs and folktales made subtle comments on errant human nature, social evils, and dim-witted rulers. But visual artists did not seem to employ their talent in a lighter vein at any time to provoke humorous thought or laughter.

On the ancient Sanskrit stage the character Vidushaka, a kind of jester, would indulge in irreverent asides at deadly serious moments in a play and send the audience into convulsions of laughter. Vidushaka's remarks always had something to do with current goings-on in the kingdom.

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But our graphic artist was at all times preoccupied with painting gods and their glorious deeds. Even such paintings were few and far between if we can judge from the evidence available today. Perhaps because the humid tropical conditions shortened the life of paintings the artist chose a more lasting medium in stone to preserve his work. He felt more at home with chisel and mallet and sculpted away in marble and granite a profusion of temples, images of gods and demons and dancing damsels, varying in size from the gigantic to the most delicate filigree design.

In England, the birthplace of the political cartoon, this art arrived late, long after prose and poetry had satirized society and the government for centuries. Cartooning appeared only in the late seventeenth century. By and by it spread to the Continent. It is of recent origin in India. It came here along with the British and made its appearance only a little more than half a century ago.

In the course of their effort to colonize the subcontinent, we for very practical reasons imbibed many British tastes, eccentricities, and habits, which became with the passage of time our second culture, as it were. The English language, the newspaper habit, and of course, cricket, to mention a few, came over in this manner from England and took root in our soil.

Meanwhile, the London humorous weekly *Punch* arrived. Its comic drawings and jokes were almost our first exposure to this kind of art which distorted reality. The educated class of Indians who were in a minority and could read and write English became addicted to this magazine. *Punch* became a household name and a synonym for humor. Even those who couldn't understand the captions could enjoy looking at the drawings of characters with exaggerated ears and elongated noses, at obese women at seaside and bean-pole-like men. For the educated, humor in this visual form was an altogether new experience. They were so impressed with it that they came to believe that British humor was the best. Although indigenous jokes and anecdotes thrived in many regions in various local languages and dialects, they unfortunately remained at the level of private jokes because of the language barriers, the paucity of printed matter, and above all the community's indifference to the matter of laughter and humor. This indifference resulted in a misunderstanding among the English that the Indian lacked a sense of humor. The educated Indian, eager to be counted out of this class of less educated countrymen, heartily agreed with the misconception. Thus the impression spread and gained general acceptance.

With the introduction of the printing press later, a few newspapers appeared and, taking care not to tread on the sensitivity of the colonial rulers, began to air local issues. These papers were mostly in English, but there were also a few magazines catering to readers of vernacular languages.

Of course, the press at the time did not play any role as a weapon to strike a blow for democracy or freedom. It merely applauded the philanthropic acts of some individuals or preached at length against such issues as child marriage or condemned the lack of social consciousness, unclean habits, and the like. But the press did not remain in this benign state for long. Events of great national significance were taking place all over the country. Political parties were coming into existence. Demands for social reform, self-rule, and freedom to discuss national affairs on the public platform and in the press began to be voiced.

The British rulers heard it all, but although they practiced and preached democracy at home and zealously guarded it as the guarantor of human dignity and fair play, they did not believe it applied to the Indians. They reacted predictably by passing laws to stifle the voice of freedom. This action only gave vitality and legitimacy to the cause and stirred up national consciousness. Now the press began to show signs of developing muscle. It exercised freedom of expression cautiously, of course, and criticized the rulers and their style of governing the country. When the comments got bolder, the authorities considered them seditious and clamped down with censorship. Editors were duly punished with fines and imprisonment. In this process some of the more daring newspapers closed down. Only those that advocated freedom in a mild, muted tone survived.

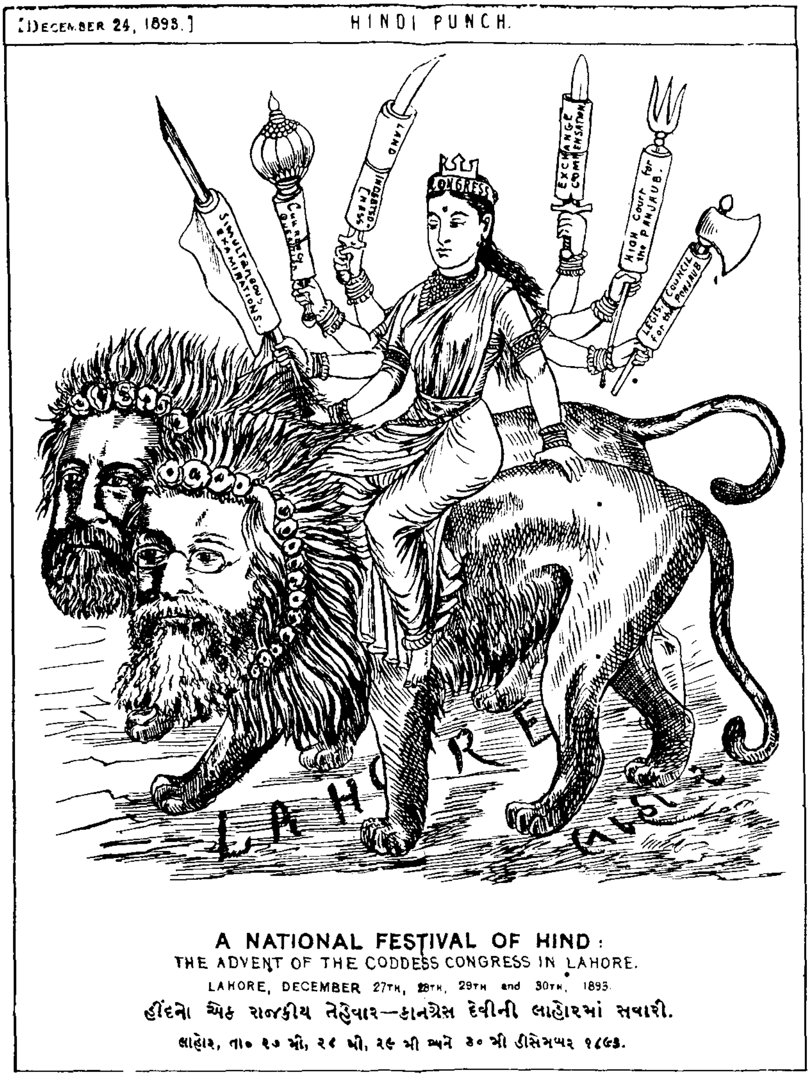
The political cartoonist worked under restricted conditions to ensure his paper's survival. He kept his ideas to broad symbols so as not to annoy any person or question any policy. Thus, his cartoons abounded in monsters, angels, tigers, lions, snakes, jackals, and elephants. There were, of course, the celebrated bulldog and the lion to represent the British rulers. A dove-eyed suffering angel symbolized mother India, otherwise known as Bharat Mata. The other creatures in the cartoonist's menagerie variously represented violence, injustice, want, famine, and pestilence according to the needs of the hour.

As the national struggle began to gain momentum, the cartoonist ventured to draw the paunchy, thick-set John Bull to represent the colonial ruler. But still the cartoons were more in line with propaganda posters than with significant satirical comments. They portrayed flaming patriotism and lampooned the alien ruler, but in a vague and impersonal way within a safe limit set by the system. The theme of the cartoons was always the same but presented in innumerable variations: Bharat Mata, the mother of the nation in chains with the legend "Imperialism" written on them. Again, the same lady was shown being crushed under the jackboot of John Bull or being burdened with the deadweight of colonial exploitation.

At this time there is no way to gauge the reaction of the common reader to these flamboyant cartoons. Perhaps they were viewed with the same interest and uncritical acceptance that was shown towards an illustration in a book of mythological tales. Our entire creative activity revolved round the mythology of the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. The poets composed songs in praise of Rama, Krishna, and Shiva.

Similarly, the dance form was based on the classics and so was the art of sculpture, which always depicted devotional themes. It is very likely that the cartoons of John Bull and Bharat Mata appeared to the viewer as extensions of those mythical concepts, showing in new versions the eternal conflict between evil and good.

In fact, in later years, when the cartoonist gained a little more independence, his task of looking for ideas was considerably eased because he borrowed heavily from the numerous ready-made incidents and anecdotes in our mythology and dressed them up to fit the irony in current political events. Thus the ten-headed demon king Ravana came in very handy to represent the number of evil aspects of the alien administration. Similarly, the British rulers' show of liberalism through reforms which were of doubtful benefit to the people, shot down by the nationalist party, was shown in the role of Rama, with his mythological bow and arrow representing in a complicated way the combined forces of patriotism and determination. Now these cartoons may seem somewhat clumsy and crude to our sophisticated taste. Nevertheless, they made a great impression on the people who were illiterate or semiliterate. They were able to comprehend the


[DECEMBER 24, 1893.]
HINDI PUNCH.
SIMULTANEOUS EXAMINATIONS.
CURRENCY QUESTION
INDEBTED. PRESS
LAND
CONGRESS
EXCHANGE COMPENSATION
HIGH Court for the PANJAUB.
LEGIS. COUNCIL for the PANJAUB
LAHORE
A NATIONAL FESTIVAL OF HIND:
THE ADVENT OF THE GODDESS CONGRESS IN LAHORE.
LAHORE, DECEMBER 27TH, 28TH, 29TH and 30TH, 1893.
હીંદનો એક રાજકીય તેહેવાર—કાનગ્રેસ દેવીની લાહોરમાં સવારી.
લાહોર, તા૦ ૨૭ મી, ૨૮ મી, ૨૯ મી અને ૩૦ મી ડીસેમ્બર ૧૮૯૩.

Sample of a Vintage Cartoon

political content in a cartoon because it was presented to them in a manner familiar to them and they were able to relate it to the prevailing situation.

Though they were called cartoons, the rudiments of cartoons as we know them were missing. They were rather jejune drawings of the academic type. The cartoonist of those days was basically a painter from the art schools trained to turn out portraits of kings and noblemen and other classical characters. For pecuniary reasons he became a cartoonist. But alas, he could not shake off the stiff academic training and allow his lines the free flow that is the soul of caricature and cartoon. To add to it the ubiquitous *Punch* magazine style, which he no doubt saw regularly for inspiration and sometimes for copying, when he desperately needed guidance in drawing a figure, stood in the way of flexibility of draftsmanship. Even in England in those days the popular cartoonists were Bernard Partridge and John Tenniel, who adhered to a classical style with no liberty taken in drawing human features or the human figure. So our cartoonist under the influence of the *Punch* artists and his own limitations continued to draw cartoons without any element of distortion or caricature in them.

But the Indian cartoonists did not remain docile and banal. The nation became engaged in a determined effort to gain independence. The cry for it was echoing loud and clear from every corner of the subcontinent. The press, both small and large, had become bolder in attacking the British and openly demanded that they quit. The British were hesitant to resort to summary punishments and arrests, for not only had world opinion become a factor to reckon with in international affairs but also our own political leaders had gained in stature and were commanding international respect. The arrival of Mahatma Gandhi on the political scene as the leader of the Independence movement gave a moral boost to the freedom struggle in a big way and attracted world sympathy for his cause. The editorial writers became unsparing in attacking the British.

The cartoonist did not lag behind. So much was happening politically that he could not help getting out of the strait jacket of conventional draftmanship and mythological ideas. Real people, the imperial representatives—viceroys, governors, collectors, and commissioners—were making their grotesque appearance in his cartoons. Mahatma Gandhi, besides being a great leader of men, was a great favorite of the cartoonist. His whole appearance with his puckish, toothless smile, his unique attire, and other factors about him made him the delight of the caricaturists. Even an inexperienced beginner in cartooning could make a highly competent caricature of him!

At about this time a young New Zealander had left his homeland and sailed to England to become the greatest cartoonist the world had ever known. His name was David Low. His style, his visual concepts, his use of material were altogether new in the field of figurative satire. Instead of the usual quill he used brush, which made his drawing bold, simple, and clear. He had a genius for the art of caricature, which again was unique. He had the gift to exaggerate the facial features of a celebrity and distort them without making them grotesque and crude, which used to be the practice earlier. Besides, he had a deep knowledge of politics and was a committed champion of social justice. The appearance of his cartoons in the satirical art world in the 1920s had a great impact on other cartoonists. Imitations of his style soon sprang up in every part of the world where cartooning existed and Low's work was seen. But the imitations came nowhere near the great master's effort. However, in the course of time such cartoons acquired a quality of their own through sheer incompetence in making good copies of Low's work.

In that period Low's cartoons were reproduced in some of the newspapers in our country, although they were somewhat outdated by the time they reached the Indian shores by boat and their themes had no relevance in the context of our politics: the Irish problem, the trade union movment, and Tory-Whig wranglings were usually the subjects of his cartoons. Occasionally he used to draw cartoons on colonial rule and on Mahatma Gandhi's arrest and civil disobedience movement. Whatever the subject, it was a joy to look at Low's vivid cartoons. Our Indian cartoonist was duly influenced by the force of his lines and the care with which he drew human anatomy, buildings, furniture, and the folds in a dress—all, of course, without losing sight of the vital need to distort and give a comical twist.

By then, Bernard Partridge and John Tennial, of *Punch* fame, had become outdated and receded to the background. The cartoonist seemed to come inescapably under David Low's influence. This influence had some beneficial effect on those who had wit and the capacity to see the irony in a political situation. These few started with copying Low even in respect to ideas if that somehow fitted a political event here. But gradually they developed their own style and sense of humor.

A modest degree of education, a general knowledge of mankind and its matters, a sense of humor, and the competence to produce an acceptable drawing are necessary to the development of a cartoonist. Regrettably, the art schools were the resorts of dropouts from educational compulsions (and still are), so the young artist who graduated from art school could not take on the career of a political cartoonist. The educated man, even if he had the inborn talent to draw, would not think of setting himself up as a cartoonist. Being a poor country, India had such economic pressures that her educated youth habitually looked for a safer haven in government service or in business houses or, still better, took to law or medicine. That was the reason India had so few cartoonists worthy of the name and the field was left free for anyone with a minimum of talent.

In the early 1930s a young man named Shankar Pillai ventured into the field of cartooning and became a national figure as a cartoonist. He was a law student and had a flair for drawing. Looking around him, he felt he could satirize the political scene. The national political movement was gearing up and provided grist to the mill for the aspiring young cartoonist.

It is not possible here to go into the details of the political struggle that our freedom fighters were waging or to describe and list each of those brave men. It would be a complicated business. It is enough for our purpose here to say that the confrontation between the British rulers and the national leaders was exciting, eventful, and inspiring. The personalities who clashed with each other were colorful and tough.

There were all the elements needed for a cartoonist. Shankar, gifted with wit and politically well informed, took full advantage of the situation in no uncertain manner. He had the added opportunity of working in Delhi, the seat of the British Raj. Furthermore, he was lucky enough to join the *Hindustan Times*, a paper with intensely nationalistic views. It was owned by a patriotically minded rich industrialist who gave his total support to Mahatma Gandhi and his cause. Soon Shankar's cartoons were making an impact on the public. The viceroys and governing councillors began to take note of his cartoons and felt peeved or cheered according to their sense of humor. One of the viceroys had become so benign that he relaxed his imperious stance and asked for the originals of Shankar's cartoons, although they were pretty uncomplimentary to his lordship. Shankar became a favorite of the public and supreme in his field. He helped to elevate the profession of the cartoonist from being the creation of mere decoration in a newspaper to being on a par in status with the editorial commentator and political analyst. In the course of his career he gave rise to many imitators, although the quality of his drawings was always amateurish, lacking in finish. His ideas were the kind which induced an instant guffaw rather than provoked a moment of contemplation and laughter. However, he made the people conscious of cartoons and their place in journalism.

Suddenly the cartoonist became an important fellow and was much sought after by editors. Each paper wanted its own cartoonist to ridicule and lampoon the powers that be. Editors realized that cartoons were not only instruments for fighting the national cause but also circulation builders if the cartoonist was a talented one. The common reader got a little bit of relief from the dreary written columns by looking at cartoons that seemed to present his own humdrum life and human miseries from a funny angle. The editor recruited young talent but smothered it from blossoming out fresh and original by expecting the cartoonists to draw and think "like Shankar." The cartoonist accepted the demand unprotestingly. A good imitation was handsomely paid for with the chance to climb the ladder of success. It took some years for Shankar's influence to fade and original efforts to assert themselves.

Then World War II broke out. The cartoonist in India, like his counterparts elsewhere in the world, did not find it hard to find a subject. Hitler, Mussolini, Churchill, Franco, and Stalin readily offered enough material to last the war. Of course the cartoonist in India, besides fighting fascism and dictatorship in the international field, had to deal with imperialists at home. But an imperial decree called the Defence of India Rule restricted his freedom. In spite of such conditions Mahatma Gandhi announced at this juncture the "Quit India" movement, which was a call for the British to leave India. The struggle against the ruler acquired a national dimension. The citizens disobeyed British laws, refused cooperation in running the administration, courted arrest voluntarily, and filled the prisons to overflowing. It was beyond the might of the imperial power to contain the people. It had to fight Germany on the Western front and Japan on the Eastern. Finally, Britain promised to leave the country at the end of the war.

During all this time the press was muzzled and strict censorship imposed. Therefore, the cartoonist had to settle for attacking Hitler, Mussolini, and Tojo and only occasionally got past the censors to take a sideswipe at the British.

The moment the war ended and the British made preparations to leave, the cartoonist began to have a field day. The nation went through a veritable political earthquake. It split in two and a new nation called Pakistan came into existence. Pakistan became a Muslim theocratic state. The enlightened Indian leaders drew up a sensible constitution based on the democratic ideals of Britain and the United States and declared India a secular republic in which every citizen enjoyed equality, liberty, and fraternity. Freedom of the press was considered sacred and provided very important checks and balances to protect our democracy. If things had run according to the ideals set by our founding fathers, the job for the Indian cartoonist would have become pretty dull. But, of course, things did not turn out that way.

It is difficult at this point not to become somewhat reminiscent, for I happen to have been a witness getting firsthand experience and impressions of the political scene of the country as it unfolded from the day of our Independence.

It was at this time I got out of college, from which I graduated in politics, economics, and philosophy. I had been a self-taught cartoonist from a very young age. Once out of school, I lost no time in settling down to my career. The conditions in the country were highly stimulating for a budding cartoonist. Everywhere I looked there appeared to be a subject for a cartoon. India was split into two nations, and there was Pakistan. After drafting our constitution, soon we were holding general elections. Then teething trouble for the young nation started in finding resources, educating the people about the value of democracy and the virtues of secularism, drawing up plans for industrial progress, improving agricultural yield, abolishing poverty. In all these there were themes the cartoonist could satirize.

There were also numerous comical asides to the serious business of building the nation. For instance, there were some eccentrics and fadists in power who, by virtue of having served prison sentences during foreign rule, were holding important positions in the ruling party and in the government. These individuals came up with ideas that seemed to be purely for the benefit of the cartoonist. Some of them nagged their more serious-minded colleagues by insisting that funds allotted for spreading education among the ignorant masses must be used first for the purpose of banning cow slaughter. Another of their demands was that total prohibition should be introduced in the vast subcontinent to drive out the evil of alcoholism. Of course, this measure straight away ushered in illicit distillation, bootlegging crime, and corruption of the police force. This policy paradoxically resulted in excessive drinking all over the country and colossal loss of excise revenue to the government.

As a cartoonist, I was doing overtime, drawing almost three or four cartoons a day. The prohibitionist who had become the chief minister of our state was new to the office. He seemed somewhat vague about the freedom of the press that our constitution bestowed on the cartoonist and tried to muzzle my activity. But, of course, he could not succeed. Finally, it was the prohibition policy that was scrapped when this gentleman disappeared from the scene after becoming extremely unpopular with the public. Even after his departure, the damage he had done to the morals of the people and to the economy continued for many years to inspire me with ideas!

Other aspects of our new republic were no less frustrating and disheartening to the serious political observer who had hoped for a more enlightened and pragmatic approach to administering a nation of (at that time) some 500 million people with aspirations for a better life. But for me it was a paradise. No better chance could have come a cartoonist's way.

Hindi had been constitutionally decreed our national language. India was a subcontinent with some fourteen major languages, which had no relation to Hindi and innumerable other dialects. The people who spoke these languages had no clue to Hindi. But the Hindi enthusiasts imagined, in all innocence, that the moment the Union Jack was brought down and our national tricolor went up, everyone would immediately forget all traces of the English that they had learned over two hundred years and begin to talk and think in Hindi. Overnight, names of public places, postal addresses, and railway signboards were changed to the national language and the English script was wiped out. This tactless act created in turn anti-Hindi fanatics who expressed their resentment by going on a rampage—burning public transport, damaging public property, and generally demolishing and burning all that could be demolished and burned. It did not stop with that. The anti-Hindi agitators went further and demanded separate linguistic identities for their states. After many more riots, demonstrations, and deaths, the union government yielded and rearranged the states on a linguistic basis. Now, at the moment there are twenty-five states each having its own language for administrative purposes and as a medium of education, making the society parochial and narrow.

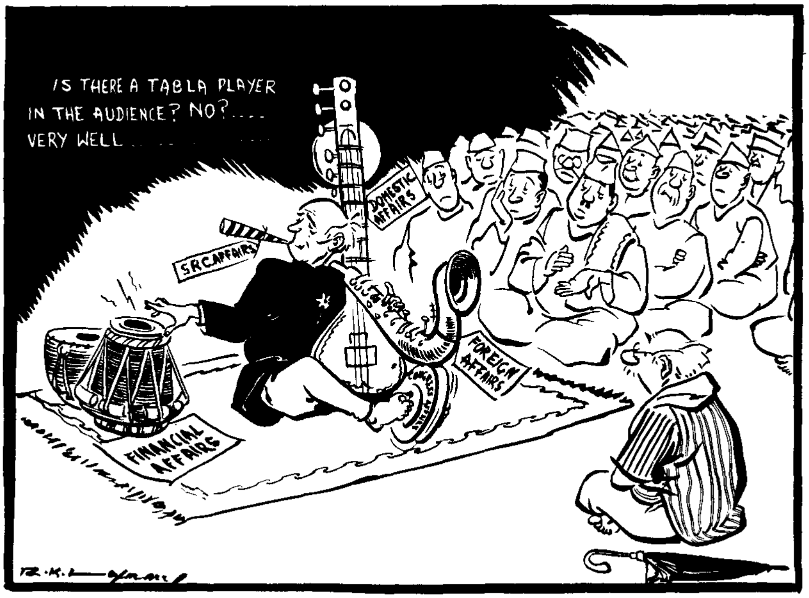
All this turmoil added color to our political life and was reflected in our cartoons. With no holds barred, the cartoonist lampooned, ridiculed, and criticized the people at the helm of affairs who were responsible for such colossal bungling.

The cartoonist did not aim his attack only at administrators. He turned his attention to the public as well, whose behavior was equally deplorable. The people wanted to name streets, public buildings, parks, and city squares after their favorite heroes in history and during the freedom movement, after the old names given by the British Raj. They went on a renaming spree. All the familiar names gone, the common man felt as if he had been shifted out to a strange land. Of course the cartoonist satirized the common man's predicament and attacked the mindless frenzy of the public wasting its time and energy on such trivialities.

Thus the new nation sparkled with many facets of interest, and moved on eagerly toward its fixed goal, falling, stumbling, toddling with a liveliness unmatched in any nation in the world. Compared with India, the postwar Western world looked dull and boring. England was pulling on its dark worn-out coat and hat and limping back to a monotonous social and political system which had been standardized over many centuries.

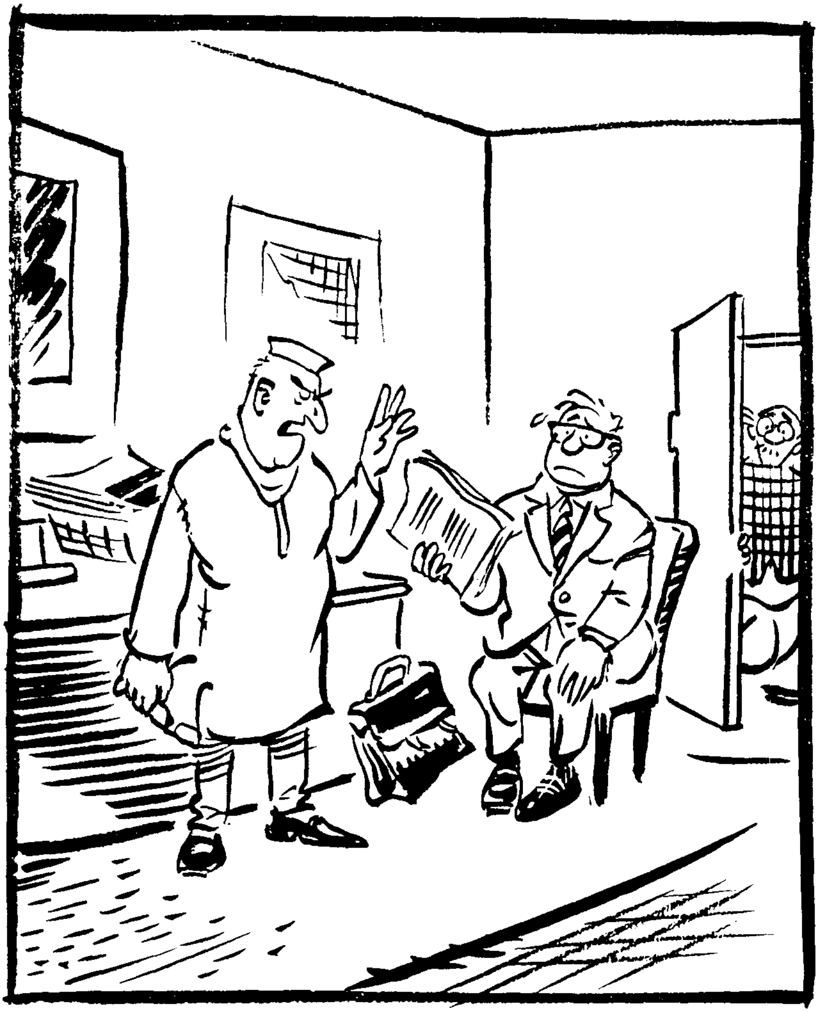
During all this turmoil our country was facing politically, economically, and socially, the press exercised its freedom and criticized the government, the political parties, and the bureaucracy, all of which combined to keep the country in a state of eternal crisis. Even the seasoned democracies of the world were amazed by the boldness with which the press was playing its role. It was indeed a tribute to our government, which strictly played fair and respected the Fourth Estate even when the press was sometimes wrong, unkind, and unwarrantedly provocative.

As I became more and more entrenched in watching and commenting on the political phantasmagoria of our country, I was finding it increasingly difficult to define the common Indian in my cartoons. For a cartoonist, time is of the essence. Deadlines hang like the sword of Damocles over the head of a political cartoonist. A good many precious minutes would be lost if he were to draw masses of people composed of Maharashtrians, Bengalis, Tamils, Punjabis, Assamese. It is easy for the cartoonist in the West, where dress and appearance are by and large standardized. Not so in India. At one end of the subcontinent are those for whom a turban is almost part of their anatomy, and at the other end of the nation in the extreme south are those with such sparse clothing that they seem clothed only in anatomy! Again, there is no way of classifying an individual by the dress he wears. An industrialist, say a textile tycoon, may be dressed exactly like a retail fruit seller. Or again, a scholar in Sanskrit, English, Greek, and Latin might look like a humble priest of an impoverished old temple. So how was I to discover and portray the common denomination in this medley of character, dress, appearance, habit?


IS THERE A TABLA PLAYER IN THE AUDIENCE? NO?.... VERY WELL . . . . . .
DOMESTIC AFFAIRS
SRC AFFAIRS
FOREIGN AFFAIRS
CONGRESS AFFAIRS
FINANCIAL AFFAIRS
R. K. Laxman

Nehru

In the early days I used to cram as many figures as I could within the available time, with all sorts of clothing and looks to represent the masses. Gradually, I narrowed my efforts down to a few figures. These my readers accepted as representing the whole of India. Finally, I succeeded in reducing my symbol to one man. He now represents the millions with his striped coat, bald head with a wisp of white hair,



You Said It

It's an excellent offer—very sensible, practical, and responsible! We like it. But we can't accept it. It doesn't fit into our policy!

and bristling mustache supporting a bulbous nose, which supports an oversized pair of spectacles. He has a permanent look of bewilderment, so suitable for our environment. He is ubiquitous. Today he is hanging about the cabinet room when a high-powered meeting is in progress. Next he is among the slum dwellers listening to their woes or among the protest marchers demanding the abolition of the nuclear bomb! That, of course, would not preclude him from being present at a banquet hosted by the prime minister for a visiting foreign dignitary. This man has for forty years survived all domestic crises, while all those politicians who professed to protect him have disappeared. He is tough and durable. He truly symbolizes the mute millions of our country, for he has not uttered a word in all these years. He is a bemused spectator of events which are beyond his control.

Within a decade of our getting independence, the tribe of cartoonists proliferated. New dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies, and many other types of magazines mushroomed everywhere. These were not only in English but in almost every written language in the country as well. Thus, vast opportunities for the cartoonist opened up. As a nation, we are rather prone to talk politics, whether at a bus stand, railway compartment, cocktail party, or public park with our fellow joggers. Of course, in those sessions what passes for politics is really gossip, rumor, hearsay, scandal rooted in some blurred facts, all combined in a palatable mixture to help spend time masticating it in between reading newspapers and political magazines, and listening to political comments on the radio. That is why, although not all publications are political in content, most of them allow a page or two for political satire and caricature as an obligation to the popular pastime. Thus, the country which didn't have a single cartoonist less than a century ago is now swarming with them, good, bad, and indifferent, competition among them having become keen and the indifferent ones who drew without sense eliminated. The bad ones improved, having to stand up to professionally superior cartoonists working in the major newspapers of the country.

I started at about this time a series called "You Said It." It was a single-column cartoon which appeared every day on the front page of our paper in its fixed place in the right-hand corner. My idea was to have a go at a freewheeling commentary on socioeconomic, sociopolitical aspects in rather a lighter vein, free of real political personalities or factual political events. The feature was not an attempt at serious analysis but meant to expose the general mood of the country. Social, political, and economic events drawn in this manner would, I expected, appeal to those who were not especially critical and who silently accepted their lot in their day-to-day life. My taciturn common man, whom I created and who was appearing off and on in my bigger cartoon in the company of Jawaharlal Nehru and his cabinet ministers, came in handy for this purpose. The other characters I built around him in this single-column cartoon were likewise fictitious—the villagers, the bureaucrats, the ministers, the crooked businessmen, the economic experts, the rebellious students, the factory workers, the leaders—nearly every type from every walk of life as the occasion warranted it. "You Said It" proved extremely popular. It has appeared daily for more than three decades, interrupted only briefly whenever I go on a holiday!

The reaction of people to the cartoons is, of course, very gratifying, but there is no way of knowing the reaction of the ministers who are the butt of my attacks. Even if they resented being ridiculed and made to look uncouth, they had no way of curbing a cartoonist. The moment a minister made an adverse remark about a cartoon, the popularity of the cartoonist who had provoked him increased. But by and large they all went about with an air of good-humored tolerance. I have had occasion to meet a few people whom I have lampooned. They have expressed admiration for my wit and understanding of political situations but have followed up by suggesting how to improve my cartoons, and where I have gone wrong in assessing certain situations. They have said, "Of course, in a democracy you are free to say anything, but you must work for the welfare of the society and not be destructive in your comments. You should not ridicule the cabinet ministers, who after all are working to improve the lot of the common man!"

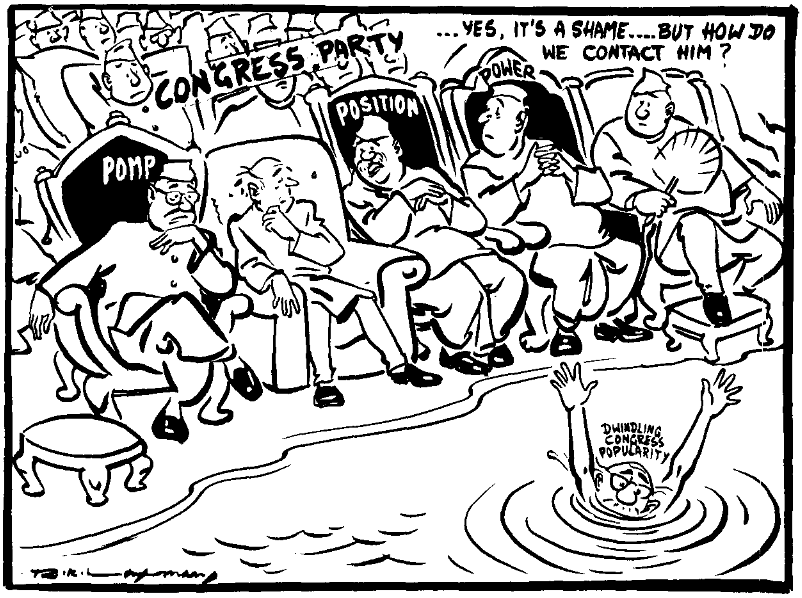
Nevertheless, amply provided with materials by the ruling party, the cartoonists of India merrily went on playing their role. The ineffectual opposition parties, their infighting, the planners, the economists, election campaigns, parliamentary debates, international affairs, and a hundred other subjects were there for the cartoonists to choose from. Smugly believing that no power was ever going to restrain us, we enjoyed our freedom.

By and large the cartoonist of a paper follows the line of editorial policy prescribed by the editor. And the editorial and the cartoon complement each other neatly. But I deviated from this practice early in my career. I found it difficult to go against my own opinion and belief. Luckily for me, the editors of our paper have always allowed me an independent role. I function without editorial supervision, and this freedom often results in a cartoon expressing a refreshingly different view from that of the editorial.

But on June 26, 1975, Mrs. Gandhi took the nation by surprise by abrogating our constitution after she lost a court suit that declared her election void. To avoid having to step down from the prime minister's post, she declared an emergency and continued as prime minister. We lost our freedom of expression overnight. The newspapers were at the mercy of the censors, who were at the mercy of the powers in New Delhi. Editorials, articles, news items, pictures, and short stories were scrutinized for seditious ideas and banned or allowed after deletions were made. Cartoons, of course, became the censors' primary target.

I was put under the central censor board at New Delhi, although I was working in Bombay and there was a regional censor who was supervising the contents of the papers and magazines coming out of that region. Every day my cartoons had to be sent to Delhi for censorship. One heard rumors of arrests without warrant and police raids on newspaper offices. Some of my journalist colleagues went to prison. For a political cartoonist, the situation became a nightmare. Whatever I drew, I ran the risk of offending someone in power. Helplessly, I began to illustrate silly jokes about fat individuals and weighing scales, extravagant wives and meek husbands, mischievous imps bothering parents and the like. I never realized that thinking up such imbecilic ideas could be so strenuous and painful. These cartoons passed the censor without difficulty in the beginning. But suddenly even some of these were banned! I was flabbergasted. I sought a personal audience with the prime minister and submitted a memorandum explaining how the censorship had become mindless and rigid and how as a cartoonist I found it difficult to survive and pleaded a more kindly approach to my profession. I was promised leniency and assured that in a democracy cartoons played an important part. From then on, my cartoons began to make their nervous appearance in our paper once again with anemic satirical content. I became overcautious and did not want to test the patience of the censors.

I gained courage in slow degrees and made inroads into the taboo areas like the Congress party, inflation, law and order, the struggle of the press under censorship, and the deception practiced by the rulers on the public through false propaganda. In the course of time I


...YES, IT'S A SHAME....BUT HOW DO WE CONTACT HIM ?
CONGRESS PARTY
POMP
POSITION
POWER
DWINDLING CONGRESS POPULARITY

Nehru

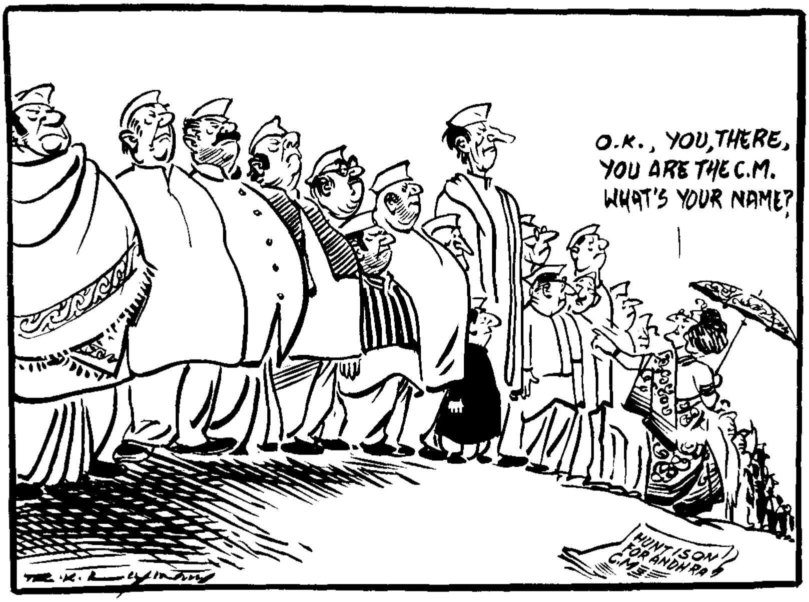
became overconfident and took my freedom for granted, as if I were functioning in a truly democratic system.

One day I received a summons from the minister in charge of press censorship. When I went before him, he warned me in no uncertain terms that I would be arrested and put behind bars if I continued to needle the government. I tried to explain to him that the prime minister herself had assured me that I could function normally. He became livid with anger and dismissed me with the threat that there was a law of censorship and that I was not above it, prime minister or no prime minister! It seemed as if there was no hope for a cartoonist in this country any more. I pondered over my predicament and finally consoled myself with the thought that I had put in over thirty years as a cartoonist and had had excellent innings. I should be satisfied and seek honorable retirement from this profession. I saw no hope that the country would ever go back to the good old days.

By now the government was not in a happy situation either, finding it difficult to maintain dictatorial rule. Moves were on by the opposition parties to overthrow the government. Underground activities had increased. In the absence of a free press, rumors of sabotage and breakdown of law and order circulated freely, adding to the atmosphere of uncertainty and to the difficulty of government administration. The image of the ruling party and the prime minister suffered untold international damage. Thus, the internal and the external pressures forced Mrs. Gandhi to call for general elections in 1977.

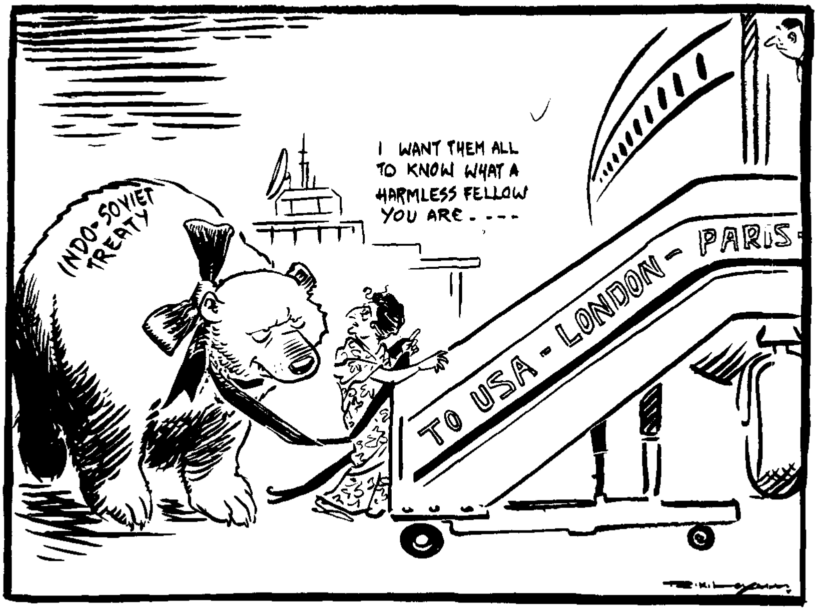
Predictably, her party was routed at the hustings. A new government came to power, and I cheerfuly went back to work, fully armed once again with my constitutional rights to lampoon and ridicule the new set of rulers. These were drawn from various parties, which hitherto had functioned only in opposition with mixed ideologies.

The new government commenced functioning with a great deal of promise and understanding. But soon ideological differences, clashing personalities, harebrained ideas about social, economic, and political aims lightened the task of the cartoonist. It almost seemed as if the new administrators were there solely to provide inspiration to the cartoonist. At some stage they even seemed to take over the job of the satirical cartoonist and render it in practical terms in the common man's day-to-day existence!


O.K., YOU, THERE, YOU ARE THE C.M. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?
HUNT IS ON FOR ANDHRA C.M.
R.K. Laxman

Indira Gandhi

But soon this government fell, and Mrs. Gandhi was again back in power, much chastened and more benign, having been out in the cold


INDO-SOVIET TREATY
I WANT THEM ALL TO KNOW WHAT A HARMLESS FELLOW YOU ARE. - - -
TO USA - LONDON - PARIS

Indira Gandhi

for two years. The policy of the country went back to that of the pre-Emergency era. It was not till after the end of Emergency that I learned why even my harmless, almost puerile, cartoons had come to be censored. A prominent member of Mrs. Gandhi's staff who was the official in charge of keeping vigil over the activities of the press told me about the psychological predicament of the censors. These officers were chosen from among the clerical staff. When my cartoon came under their scrutiny, the censor was in a fix, I was told. If he understood a cartoon and it tickled his wit, he immediately banged the rubber stamp "Rejected" on it on the basis that something that made people laugh might be an antigovernment reaction. But if the cartoon showed no scope for laughter at all, it got the reject stamp even so—because it might harbor pernicious intentions.

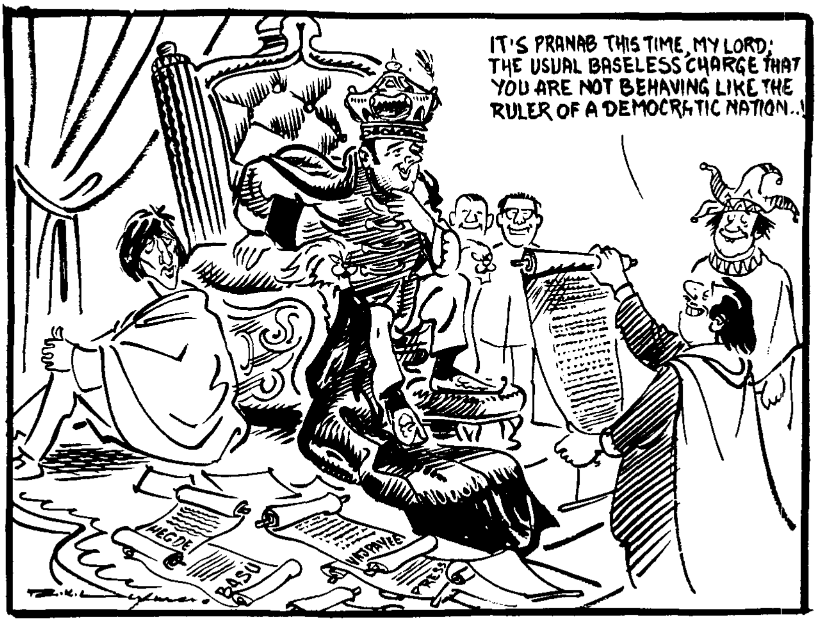
The cartoonists started caricaturing the Congress party and the prime minister as before. Young talents made their appearance in the field, attempting the "instant cartoon" style that was coming into fashion, in which drawings were mere doodles and the captions bore the burden of conveying the humor. There was a great deal of activity in the world of cartooning. A number of cartoon exhibitions and competitions with attractive cash awards were held. The government of India itself sponsored such exhibitions at home and abroad.

In 1984 Mrs. Gandhi fell to an assassin's bullet, and her son Rajiv Gandhi became the prime minister. This young person was energetic, full of progressive ideas, eager to take the country to the twenty-first century ahead of time, and hoping to solve all the problems of poverty, ignorance, and unemployment still plaguing the nation after forty years of independence. We cartoonists held our breath and watched him with trepidation. We feared that the source of inspiration for cartoons might dry up. In a utopia there would be no scope for crisis and adversity, on which, after all, the art of satire thrived! Besides, he was a handsome young man with well-proportioned features that gave no handle with which to create a true caricature.

But very shortly he belied our fears. Now our profession is secure and continues to flourish. As for his uncaricaturable features, they have given way to a variety of amusing symbols. The reader finds no difficulty at all in recognizing the leader, however stylized and distorted his features are in the drawings.

Now the cartoonists, the political analysts, and the editors are functioning without any serious threat to their freedom in the press. In fact, the press has become extremely critical of late of the government headed by Rajiv Gandhi. He came to power with a massive mandate in the elections. He enjoyed tremendous popularity among the people. But within two years he lost it by committing a series of avoidable blunders. He betrayed a lack of capacity to rule, to make friends and influence people, and to seek advice. He distanced himself from party members and the people at large and surrounded himself with buddies from school and surrendered to their immature advice. People's disillusionment was reflected in the newspapers day in and day out. They attacked him mercilessly and voiced concern about the survival of the country. Added to all this, certain allegations of corrupt practices, dark deeds of kickbacks in the arms purchase deals, and accounts in Swiss banks were brought out into the open by the indefatigable investigative journalists.

As if to benefit the cartoonist, there are a few distinct traits of Mr. Gandhi which are available for use in our cartoons. Mr. Gandhi was employed as a pilot in the national airways before he became prime minister of this vast subcontinent, so naturally, aircraft, parachutes, pilots' uniforms, airports, and other items frequently


IT'S PRANAB THIS TIME, MY LORD; THE USUAL BASELESS CHARGE THAT YOU ARE NOT BEHAVING LIKE THE RULER OF A DEMOCRATIC NATION..!
HEGDE
BASU
VAJPAYEE
PRESS
R. K. Laxman

Rajiv Gandhi

feature in the political cartoons to parody the ruler. So do electronic gadgets, computers, and such modern devices, for it is well known that he is a great believer in progressive means to run the nation. And again his passion for driving cars at breakneck speed is, of course, yet another point the cartoonist can draw upon to make pictorial comment.

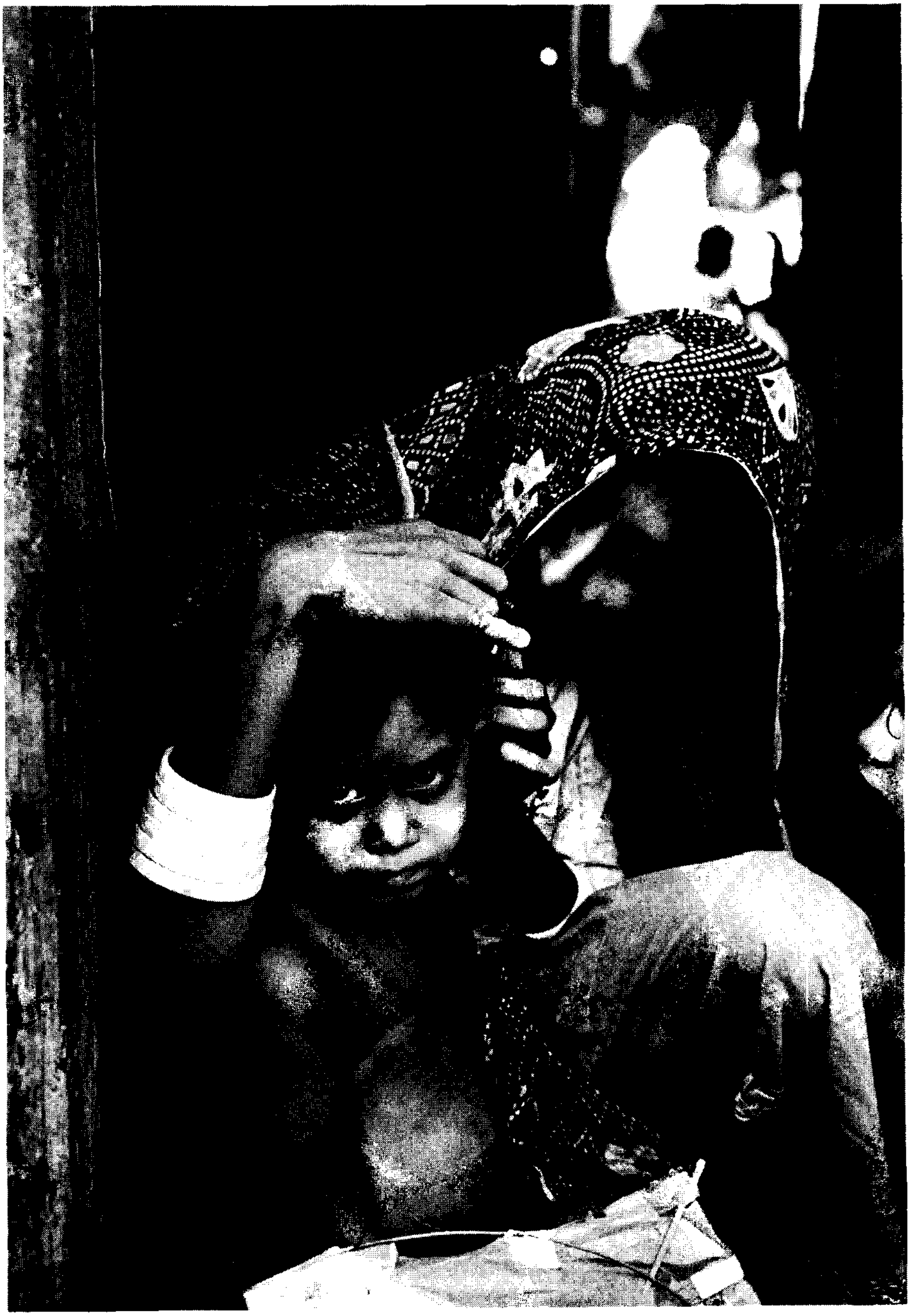
But somehow in such a paradise for cartoonists, the free secular political life got entangled with religion of the most bigoted type. India being a country of many religions, castes, and subcastes, it becomes difficult to separate secular politics from its religious surroundings. And religion and castes being the sacred cows of the nation, religious sensitivity cannot be touched without causing bloody riots in the streets. Thus, a cartoonist is not sure sometimes if he is treading on someone's religious toes when he comments on a political issue. At such delicate moments it is wise for the cartoonist to set aside his freedom a bit and accept some self-imposed censorship and carefully avoid apportioning the blame to one party or another for the riots. He should take a general view of political groups and show the caste system as a whole as an evil monster that is out to damage the fabric of harmonious living and destroy innocent lives.

Despite my care, I have been guilty of offending the sensibility of a few religious believers over the years. This, naturally, I have done in the course of my work quite inadvertently. At one time or another, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, Sikhs, and people belonging to obscure sects have, through telephone calls, letters, and personal visits warned me and expressed their indignation at the grave damage done to their religions through certain cartoons. Of course, it is alarming when listed in this manner what has occurred sporadically over a period of forty years of my career, which certainly has not been as hazardous as it might sound here.

Meanwhile, owing to an increase in literacy among the people of India, there has been a great demand for reading material, and the modern technology of printing is able to meet this demand. Many new magazines, periodicals, and newspapers have come into existence in recent times.

Most of these are liberally enlivened by cartoons depicting political events and caricatures of public personalities. But the country has made very meager headway in the field of cartoons illustrating gags of the kind the *New Yorker* or other magazines carry. We still depend upon syndicated material from abroad for these, particularly for comic strips. Superman, Flash Gordon, Phantom, Blondie, Mickey Mouse, and Mutt and Jeff have all found their reincarnation in many local languages in several dailies and magazines all over the country. There have been some attempts to produce indigenous comics. Here again, they have all been dependent on our good old mythologies. These comic strips sadly lack drama and pictorial grandeur and are too moralistic. A few that attempt to be in line with modern readership and produce comedy depicting crime fall into the trap of imitation.

Perhaps the comic art form will also evolve out of this dilemma successfully, as did the art of political cartooning from its early days of obscure mythical symbols and weak imitations to the hard-hitting political satire that it has become today, freely flourishing as one of the several safeguards of democracy.



The Public, the Private, and the Sacred

Charles Correa

For the Indian architect, every builtform is a mandala, a model that represents the nature of the cosmos. The architect creates public as well as private spaces that symbolize and incarnate the nonmanifest, which we glimpse through religion, philosophy, and the arts. From ancient sacred structures like stupas to modern low-rise housing, Indian architecture reflects forms found in India's geography which have meaning for another landscape: that of the Indian consciousness. Indian architects today face the challenge of designing forms that can both accommodate the masses and express their commitment to the mythic.

I

We live in a world of manifest phenomena. Yet, since the beginning of time, man has intuitively sensed the existence of another world: a nonmanifest world whose presence underlies—and makes endurable—the one he experiences every day. The principal vehicles through which we explore and communicate our notions of this nonmanifest world are religion, philosophy, and the arts. Like these, architecture too is generated by mythic beliefs, expressing the presence of a reality more profound than the manifest world in which it exists.

Charles Correa is an architect in Bombay.

In India, these beliefs are all-pervading. They surface everywhere since they are not confined to formal art and philosophy but thrive in popular incarnations as well. Even in the overcrowded commercial center of a metropolis like Bombay, every twenty feet or so we find a sacred gesture—a *rangoli* (a pattern of colored powder) on a doorstep, a *yantra* (a geometric depiction of cosmic order) painted on a wall, a shrine, a temple.

These gestures are a crucial and an integral part of the spaces we inhabit. Although there is much discussion among social theorists, politicians, city planners, and a great many others about the public and the private realms that constitute our habitat, there is hardly any attention paid to this, the sacred, realm.

Yet, when we look at human society across history and around the planet, the sacred is perhaps the most important realm of all, for it expresses the invisible passions that move us. Consider, for instance, the various countries of Europe. Do we not find Italy (which, like India, is filled with sacred gestures) the most compelling? When we arrive in France, the Catholic religion and the Latin culture are similar, but the gestures are less frequent. France is more secular, so it does not move us quite as much. When we get to Switzerland, we find hardly any sacred gestures at all. Is this why Switzerland can never be as riveting, as evocative, as Italy? Swiss chocolates are delicious, the people are polite, the scenery is beautiful, but it is not quite the same. To the Japanese, Mount Fuji is sacred; to the Swiss, Mont Blanc is just a very high mountain. This difference is of decisive importance to their architecture and to their lives.

In Japan, indeed, the public, the private, and the sacred realms all hold together like a three-legged stool, to give strength and stability to society. Almost every visitor comments on the changing face of Japan; how then does Japanese society, living at the cutting edge of new technology, remain stable? Perhaps because most of the rapid changes we observe are in the public realm. For the vast majority of Japanese, the private and the sacred realms have remained quite intact (as a visit to the shrines at Kamakura or Nara will confirm—every few meters there are sacred gestures: the stones placed in the moss beneath a tree, the white paper prayers fluttering in the wind, the students practicing the solemn ritualistic choreography of Zen archery).

So also with India. The British, through their massive intervention in the fields of law, administration, transport, and communication, initiated a great many changes in the public realm. The other two realms stayed untouched, so the essential values of Indian society remained stable—not just for the rural masses but for urban dwellers as well. (If in doubt, glance at the matrimonial ads in any of our newspapers!)

Of course by *sacred*, one does not mean only the religious but the primordial as well. Religion is perhaps the most facile path to the world of the nonmanifest, but it is not the only one. In fact, as Europe has increasingly distanced itself from religion over the last two centuries, the primordial has become a fecund source of the mythic. This is why Picasso and Matisse in their paintings, Stravinsky in his music, and Le Corbusier in his architecture intuitively searched out the primitive. They wanted to find the sacred.

Another fertile breeding ground of the sacred is nature. There is something intrinsic to awesome mountain ranges like the Himalayas, and to great seas and oceans, that triggers the metaphysical in us and turns our thoughts toward the nonmanifest. Certainly the love of the English for their landscape and their sensitivity to it (perhaps harking back to the tree worship of the Druids?) is arguably one of the most mythic and sacred of their values. And in Scandinavia, the wellspring of the metaphysical is not only landscape (e.g., the fjords of Norway, the northern lights of Lapland) but also climate (hence the dark winters of Sweden reflected in the brooding films of Ingmar Bergman, with their epic struggles of Good and Evil). So also for us here in India, the word *aakash* conveys much more than just "sky." To walk on a seashore in the evening, or to cross a desert and arrive at a house built around a courtyard, is an extraordinary experience. At such a moment, subtle responses are set off in our minds, responses conditioned by thousands of generations of life on this planet. Perhaps they are the half-forgotten memories of a primordial landscape, of a paradise lost. In any event these spaces, open to the sky, condition our perceptions very powerfully, bringing a sense of the ineffable into our lives. While the symbol of education in North America has been the little red school house, in India—as in most of Asia—it has always been the guru sitting under a tree. Not only is this image of the Lord Buddha under the peepul tree more sensible than the idea of sitting inside a stuffy room; it is also far more evocative, more conducive to enlightenment.

In Hinduism, another source of the sacred is the ecstasy of physical union. This has always been central to Tantric philosophy. In *Sri Yantra*, the greatest of all the geometric depictions of cosmic order used as aids for meditation, this ecstasy is depicted as the interpenetrations of nine triangles, four facing upward and five downward, together symbolizing the union of Shiva and Shakti and representing the creative energy that created the manifest world. In this century, these ancient sources of the nonmanifest were reincarnated in the novels of D. H. Lawrence, who through sex, through nature, through the primordial, strove to rediscover the sacred in the midst of an industrialized society.

All these sources of the nonmanifest are also present in Hinduism, which can be described as a general theory incorporating in a pluralistic fashion a great number of subsystems, including animism and nature worship. Thus, to the Hindu, there is not only a sacred geometry (e.g., the *mandalas*, which we will examine presently) but a sacred geography as well, consisting of mountains, lakes, the confluence of rivers. Each of these makes the presence of the sacred vivid within the context of our everyday lives.

It is the main purport of this essay that the sacred realm is of fundamental importance to any understanding of Indian architecture (and, by extension, to the rest of our built environment). The sacred is neither public nor private, though it qualifies both immeasurably by engaging the mythic dimensions inherent in the nonmanifest. Mankind has always been fascinated by the invisible, the unknown, the unknowable.

Perhaps, as the economist E. F. Schumacher has pointed out, it reflects the hierarchy we experience in the very process of living, as we move along the natural progression from stone to plant to animal to human being. Stones are by our definition no more than the material they comprise (if there is a secret life of stones, we are unaware of it). Plants, we say, consist of physical materials, with a new entity added—life!—and the journey toward the invisible has begun. Animals consist of materials plus life plus motivation. With humankind, there is yet another entity—self-awareness—which puts us in the world of the unseen, for everything essential in our fellow human beings—their thoughts, emotions, aspirations, fantasies—are invisible to us. These "invisibilia" are of infinitely greater power and significance than the "visibilia" of everyday life. Strange indeed that, since the beginning of time, man has used the most materialistic of elements, like stone and earth, steel and concrete, to convey the invisible and compulsive myths that obsess him.

II

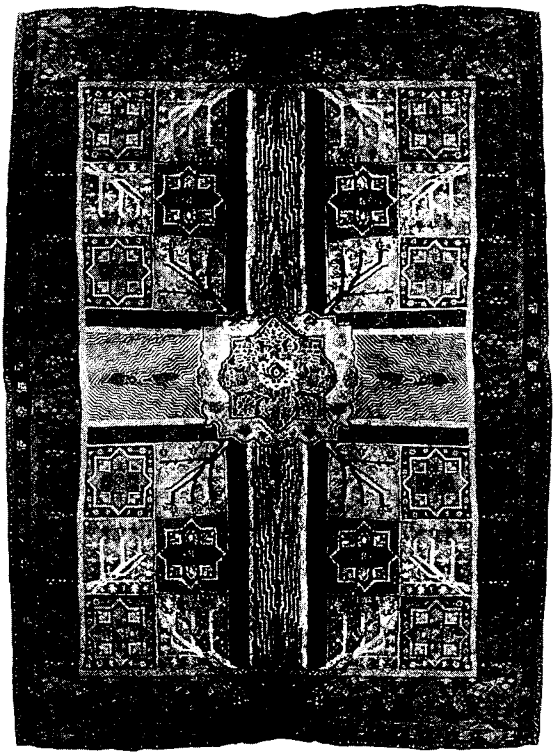
In India, the mythic beliefs that generate the deep structure of builtform go back thousands of years. Since according to Vedic thought, the world we see is only part of our existence, the forms and events we perceive are significant merely to the extent that they help us understand the nonmanifest layers that lie beneath; the magic diagrams, the yantras, explain the true nature of the cosmos. Of these, the *vastu-purush mandalas* form the basis of architecture. Thus buildings are conceived as models of the cosmos—no less!

Each vastu-purush mandala is a perfect square, subdivided into identical squares, creating a series which starts from 1 and goes on to 4, 9, 16, 25 . . . right up to 1,024. (See the next page for an example.) In temple architecture, the most commonly used mandalas, or patterns symbolic of the universe, are those of 64 and 81 squares, with the various deities allocated places in accordance with their importance and with the mystical qualities inherent in the diagram.

The mandala is not a plan; it represents an energy field. Its center signifies both *shunya* (the absolute void) as well as *bindu* (the world seed and the source of all energy). In all mandalas, at this center is located Brahman, the Supreme Principle. According to Hinduism, when the cycles of reincarnation are finally over, and the *atman* (the individual soul) is released from each of us, it goes to Brahman (to the center of this energy field).

The analogy to the black holes of contemporary physics is astounding. Energy devours itself, and the individual soul (after completing all the cycles of reincarnation) goes not to an eternal reward in Heaven or the Garden of Paradise but down the vortex at the center of a black hole. How incredible that such a concept should have surfaced so many thousands of years ago. As the noted French academician Gaston Bachelard has pointed out, the intuitive insight of the artist (or for that matter, the seer) cannot be explained through the cause-and-effect structure of scientific reasoning but, like a depth charge, explodes in the center of our being, releasing to the surface the debris of our unconscious. This is why the invisible, the mythic, the sacred, will always be central to art—and to our lives.

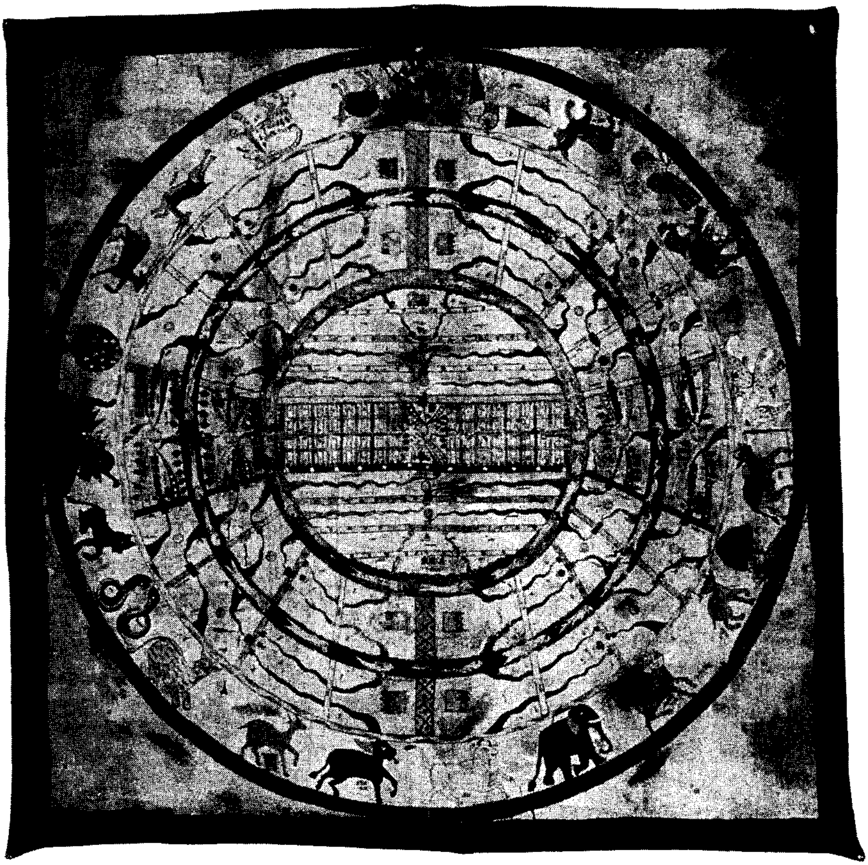
Another reservoir of mythic images is the Jain cosmograph, depicting the manifest landscape of the middle world. Cosmographs usually represent the continents inhabited by man, with all the various species of animals, the encircling waters, and the long rivers. In the center is Mount Meru, the sacred mountain. This powerful Vedic archetype is directly translated into builtform in the Buddhist stupas, among the most perfect examples extant of architecture as a model of the cosmos. (See page 100 for an example.) Their very form symbolizes Mount Meru. The central wooden post buried within the masonry is *yupa*, the *axis mundi* (the column that passes through the center of the universe). Around the stupa (the dome-shaped mound) is the open-to-sky *pradakshina*, a sacred circumambulatory pathway



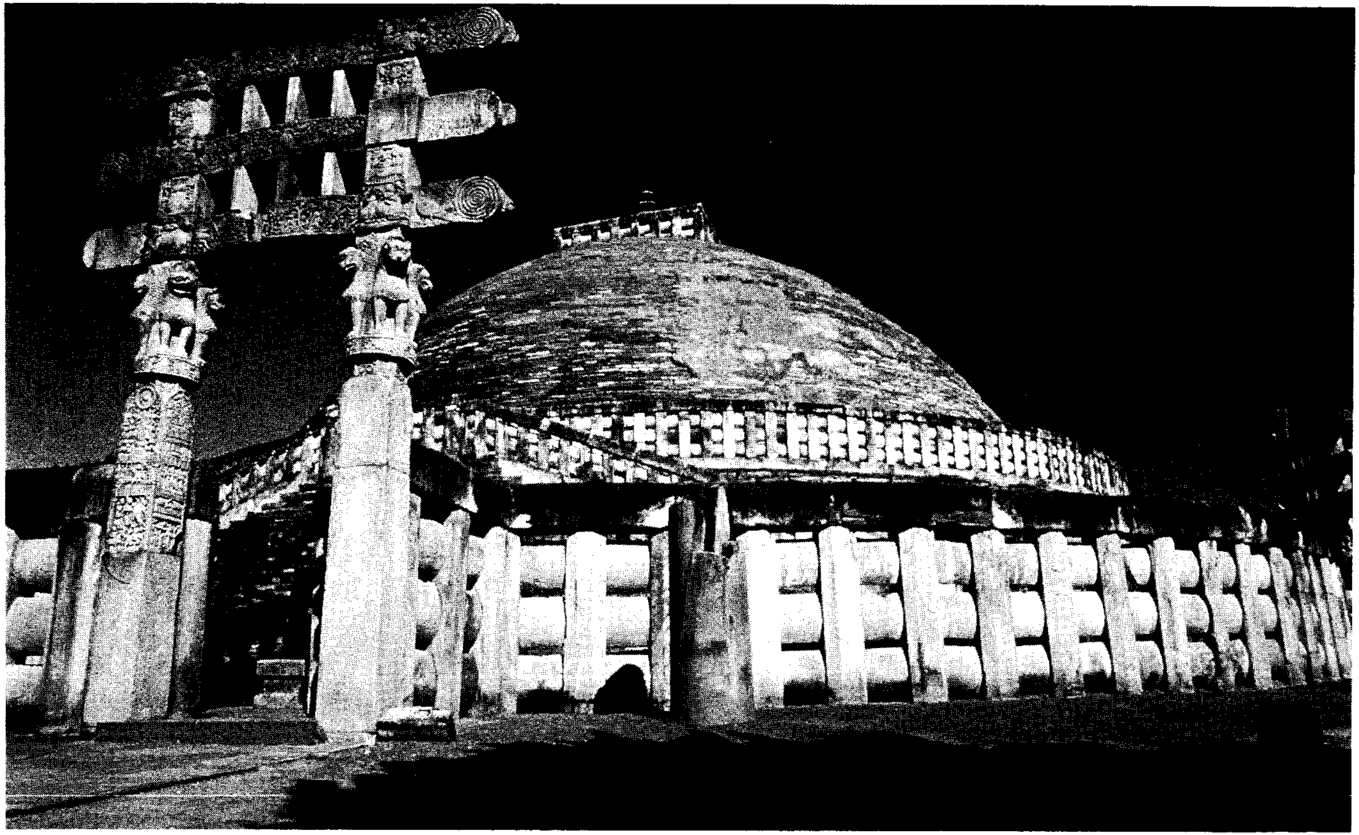
Vastu-Purush Mandala

through which the pilgrim walks and feels he becomes one with the cosmos that the stupa represents.

These metaphysical concerns are clearly articulated in Jain icons of Purush (man), depicting his two principal aspects: human and cosmic. This is a paradigm we can perhaps extend to represent the more generalized condition of man and his context (i.e., the mythic beliefs in which he perceives himself to exist). Man, in all probability regardless of time or place, does not change—but his context changes. Thus with the coming of Islam, the context of the cosmos is replaced by new myths. In part, these are a personal relationship with a judgmental divinity, and in part these are a social contract (as in the Christian precept "Love thy neighbor"). The mythic images change



Jain Cosmograph



Buddhist Stupa at Sanchi

also, from the vastu-purush mandala to the *char-bagh* (the paradise garden of Persia, a concept that goes far back into history and is an enduring feature of Persian art and architecture). Linked with a love of trees and flowers, these gardens reflect the harmony between man and nature; symbolically and physically, water is the source of life, and the four water channels meeting at right angles in the center symbolize the meeting of man and God. The builtform generated by these new myths changes dramatically. The austere severity of cosmic analogues is replaced by a new architecture of sensuous form and surface, of exquisite and hedonistic delight.

A peerless example of the char-bagh as architecture is Humayun's tomb, built in memory of the emperor Akbar's father. Constructed of red sandstone with a dressing of white marble, it was the first substantial example of Mughal architecture. Here the char-bagh motif has been enlarged and repeated in intricate patterns, generating a whole new world of architectonic concepts, and making this a work of seminal importance to the other great masterpieces of Mughal architecture that were to follow. The extraordinary power mythic beliefs and images exercise on architecture is evident in a comparing of the Jain cosmograph with the Islamic char-bagh. Both are metaphysical landscapes, but since they are based on profoundly different concepts of the essential nature of man and his context, they each lead inevitably to a totally different architecture.

With the arrival of the European colonialists, the myths changed again. The Europeans brought new values: science, rationalism, progress—fallout from the Age of Reason. These found an enthusiastic response in India—possibly because considerable capability in mathematics, astronomy, and science already existed there. India was affected in profound ways. First, there was the impact of nineteenth-century high tech (railways, post and telegraph services) crisscrossing the subcontinent with dazzling speed, changing irrevocably the poorest Indian's sense of mobility, communication—and hence, aspirations.

From this impact followed the second consequence. To Indians (as indeed to other Asians) the scientific and technological achievements of the Europeans were primarily an outcome of their attitude toward life. In all of Asia, for so many centuries, we have carried so much luggage. Suddenly a new position was perceived: we were stronger if we did not prejudge any option, in fact, if we did not carry any luggage at all, if the mind was a tabula rasa. To draw on a clean slate must have been a heady message indeed: to invent the future, or more modestly, to invent appliances for everyday comfort—mosquito nets and solar topees and extendable armchairs. Or, more grandly, to invent a new city: Chandigarh. Or most ambitious of all: to reinvent China through a structure of communes! The myths of the Age of Reason, like the ones that went before them, are truly mind-blowing.

Of course not all colonialists were fascinated by the values of rationalism and science. The vast majority were soldiers or administrators or traders, and to assert their presence (or perhaps to reassure themselves), they imported European architecture and life-styles to the subcontinent, regardless of any relevance they might have had. Architecture based on the superficial *transfer* of images from another culture or another age cannot survive; architecture must be generated from the *transformation* of those images, that is, by expressing anew the mythic beliefs that underly the images. Yet sadly, as the decades went by, European architecture in India retreated more and more into a cocoon of remembered symbols and gestures.

Furthermore, even as these influences were spreading, the intrinsic power of the tabula rasa was running out of steam. Life (or art) drawn on a clean slate can, in time, become quite meaningless—even nihilistic—precisely because it does not carry any luggage or have any umbilical cord. Quite soon, the rational becomes the merely commonsensical and eventually dwindles into the prosaic. In architecture, the frisson of the tabula rasa becomes the stupefying banality of one more high-rise glass box.

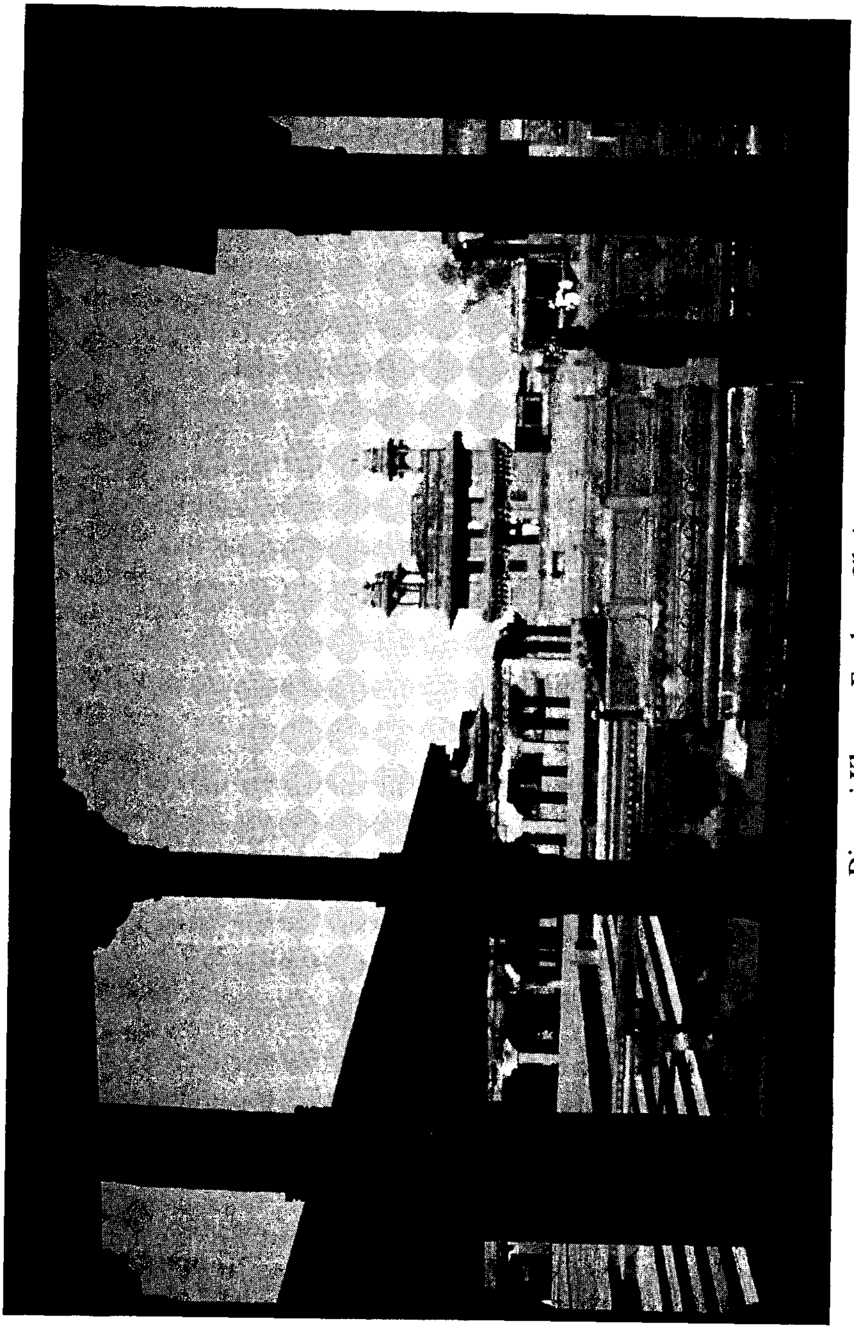
In the process, our lives become impoverished. Ivan Illich has written eloquently about the vital conceptual differences between the cleansing waters of ancient myth and the H_2O that is pumped hydraulically through our municipal pipelines. The prosaic architecture we create today is not due just to the banality of the forms we construct but also to the mundane briefs we address (which in turn, I guess, reflect the kind of lives we all lead). Would the magnificent *kund* at Modhera have the same impact on us if it were built for some other purpose—say a drive-in theater? The form might be identical, but where would be the axis mundi connecting the mythic powers of the water below to the sky above? The sacred realm is a crucial part of our environment, but over the last few decades we have increasingly blanked it out of our consciousness. The price we have paid is incalculable.

III

Today, perhaps because of modern communication systems, there are many diverse cultures, life-styles, and value systems simultaneously operative in almost every society. This state of affairs—perceived to be unique to our times—causes confusion and despair. Yet was life in India really much different in earlier centuries? Perhaps because of its pluralistic construct, Hinduism has always had an astonishing ability to absorb diverse myths—to reinvent them, so to speak, so that they gain new currency. This ability has been of decisive importance to India's history. With time, as man's perception of his context changed (the cosmos replaced by the char-bagh, the paradise garden by the Age of Reason, and so on), the new myths had to be absorbed, ingested, internalized—and finally transformed into a new architecture. India offers countless examples of such transformations; we shall point out just two.

The first is the Diwan-i-Khas, the audience hall for nobles built by the Moghul emperor Akbar in Fatehpur-Sikri. (See pages 104 and 105.) It consists of a small cube, in the center of which is a monumental column connected to the corners by four bridges. It is generally believed that Akbar used this structure for special audiences. Akbar sat on top of the column with his principal advisers at the far end of each of the bridges. The visitor came in at the lower level and explained the problem he faced or the favor he sought. Akbar could then summon any one of his advisers for conference (without the others intriguing with each other). If, as Le Corbusier said, a house is "a machine for living," then we may say that the Diwan-i-Khas is a machine for governing an empire.

But it is much more than this. For though the square plan came with Akbar from central Asia (the square being inherent in the deep structure of the human mind), to the Hindu craftsmen constructing the building the square would have represented a mandala, a model of the cosmos. To them, the presence of the central column must have been devastating, for in the center of the mandala in which bindu, the source of all energy, is located, there was not Brahman but the emperor Akbar. Furthermore, in case anybody missed the point, the

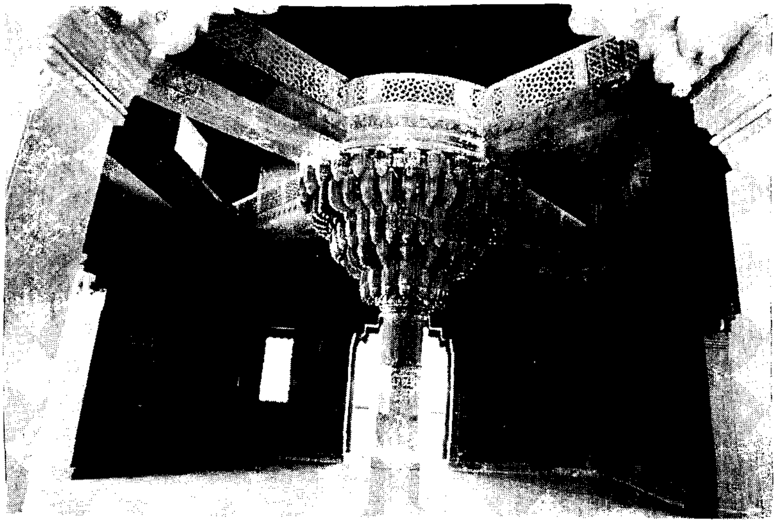


Diwan-i-Khas at Fatehpur-Sikri

column he sat on is clearly Buddhist-Hindu in form and, as such, cannot help but signify the center of the Buddhist-Hindu universe.

We perceive, then, that the Diwan-i-Khas is a transformation of staggering metaphysical and political impact. In it, Akbar was using the myths of Hinduism and Buddhism to proclaim that a new political order had arrived. Yet he did so not in a gigantic, intimidating structure but through a small, humanly scaled edifice. He was acting with great finesse, almost with love—as though he wanted to heal the differences that separate (as in the new religion he synthesized—Din-i-Ilahi).

The second example of transformation is the plan for the city of Jaipur, built in the eighteenth century in Rajasthan. Jaipur represents a transformation of another kind. Maharaja Jai Singh, who founded the city, was also the renowned astronomer who built the five *jantar mantars* (observatories) at Delhi, Jaipur, Ujjain, Banaras, and Allahabad. In the planning of Jaipur he embarked on a truly extraordinary venture. He sought to combine his passion for the latest tenets of contemporary astronomy with the most ancient and sacred of his beliefs. The plan of the city is based on a nine-square mandala corresponding to the *navagraha*, or nine planets. The void in the central square he used for the palace garden. (Because of the presence of a hill, a corner square was moved diagonally across.)



Detail of Diwan-i-Khas: The Char-Bagh

Jaipur's plan is worthy of admiration and emulation: for the clarity of its main arteries, the efficiency of its water-management system, the understanding of essential socioeconomic patterns, and above all, for the startling relevance to us today of the transformation between past and future, between material and metaphysical worlds, among public, private, and sacred realms, that Maharaja Jai Singh sought to synthesize.

The *manthan* (churning generated by seemingly conflicting systems of thoughts) is not just a contemporary disturbance; it has always existed, producing one of the prime sources of energy for man's will to act. At times, even when the mythic values and images remain unchanged, this energy is generated because the building technology alters. When such change occurs, the architect must transform, must reinvent, the old images in terms of the new technology. What he must not do is merely transfer the old mythic images despite their irrelevance to the changed technology—which today is so debilitating both to the architect and to the society in which he builds. This distinction between *transfer* and *transformation* is of fundamental importance. For instance, all of Le Corbusier's buildings clearly are the work of a Mediterranean man, yet in none of them did the architect ever use a sloping roof of tiles. Instead, Le Corbusier seems to have taken the age-old images and values of the Mediterranean and (perhaps unconsciously or compulsively) reinvented them in the twentieth-century technology of concrete and glass. This is true transformation. It places architecture where it rightfully belongs: at the intersection of culture, technology, and human aspiration.

Another obvious example of transformation is the work of Aalvar Aalto in Finland, but the one I would particularly draw to your attention is Frank Lloyd Wright and the truly extraordinary houses he created around the turn of the century in the midwestern states of the U.S.A. It would seem that in that oeuvre, Wright singlehandedly invented the way the American middle class was going to live. The builders' houses constructed in suburbia over the last three or four decades are really just hand-me-down versions of Wright's Usonian prototypes, with all the compulsive imagery intact: the two steps up to the raised dining area, the carport, the picture window. How did Wright do it? Not because of any dependence on historic "quotes" or "references" (surely architects who study only history are condemned to repeat it?) but because he understood well the culture and the technology of his time and—most important of all—because he could read perfectly the aspirations of the middle Americans he was addressing.

For the United States, another great generator of populist mythology has been the Hollywood studios. "There is no myth known to the human race," wrote Gore Vidal, albeit ironically, "which did not achieve its apotheosis in the Hollywood films of the 30s and 40s." Certainly, to a visitor like me, the recent waterfront renewal schemes in Boston, Baltimore, and New York read as transformations of old MGM musicals like *Meet Me in St. Louis* and *Singin' in the Rain*: an innocent all-singing, all-dancing America for which perhaps the majority of citizens yearn.

Thus does architecture recycle myth. To build similar waterfront scenes in London or Yokohama would be mere superficial transfer—for Gene Kelly and his ilk are not part of the mythology there. But in downtown America one could argue for their legitimacy, though obviously they lack the spiritual content that is seemingly a prerequisite of the sacred.

Indian cinema has produced its mythic images as well—images that seem to haunt the collective imagination of this subcontinent. In the sparse fare available on the government-controlled television network, the Sunday evening movie is watched by millions and millions of families across the nation, with the whole household, including retainers and servants, forming a small community around the set. In such a context, it is indeed chilling to realize how inherently vicious and unjust the relationships between landlord and serf are—rich and poor, powerful and meek.

Furthermore, as an architect who has been influenced by the double heights and spatial pyrotechnics of Le Corbusier and Wright, it is particularly mortifying to note the entrance of the grand villain. Usually played by an actor called Pran, he almost always lives in a duplex apartment, or a house with several double-height spaces, so that he can come prancing down the stairs to deliver a particularly cruel line. Architecture as the expression of power—monetary, political, physical—is a nexus not perceived by most architects, but one which is palpably vivid to Indians gathered around a TV screen.

Another area where the built triggers subtle and metaphysical feelings within us is the phenomenon of open-to-sky spaces. In fact, because of their extraordinary qualities (which we have discussed earlier), these spaces provide the key to one of the most daunting issues facing the nation—the task of providing an environment for the urban poor. Today our towns and cities, like those elsewhere in the Third World, are being engulfed by a tidal wave of distress migration from the rural hinterland. Their growth rate is phenomenal. Over the last decade or two, many of these urban centers have doubled in population. In the process, the squatter colonies have increased tenfold. Twenty years ago, the city of Bombay had a population of 4.5 million of which half a million were squatters. Last year, they numbered well over 4 million persons—out of a city population of 9 million!

Attempts to deal with this phenomenon through the construction of "low-cost" housing built of brick and concrete have proved abortive, since they are far beyond the earning capacity of the poor and so end up being transferred (often illegally) to the middle class. Nor is it possible to subsidize such construction on a national scale—since there are a great many other priorities (food, health, education, job generation) competing for such meager resources as do exist.

Yet when one looks at the indigenous life-styles and builtform topologies prevalent all over India, one wonders: in our warm climate, must a family's essential activities (cooking, sleeping, entertaining friends) really take place within the four walls of a room? Could they not occur in verandas and terraces and courtyards? Under Bombay's conditions, where such spaces are livable for more than nine months of a year, we estimate that they have a usability coefficient of about half that of a room. Now rooms have a production cost (dependent on the amount of bricks, cement, steel, and other materials used to build them); open-to-sky space has a production cost as well (measurable in the amount of additional land, roads, and service lines it requires).

By quantifying these various costs and benefits, the points of trade-off can be determined, and the most desirable—and economical—patterns of housing identified. In most Indian cities, these turn out to be low-rise, high-density configurations, making extensive use of terraces, verandas, and courtyards (i.e., the qualities inherent in aakash)—for in a warm climate (like cement, like steel) open-to-sky space is a resource, providing pragmatic advantages as well as metaphysical and sacred ones.

IV

And so we come to one of the most crucial issues facing the contemporary architect in today's India: how does one create an architecture of relevance for the millions upon millions of urban poor? What are their mythic images, their aspirations? The TV antenna? The neon light? The nylon sari? These, for the majority of our people, are powerful and legitimate dreams, coexisting in their lives with the rangoli on the floor, the yantra on the wall, the bindu on the forehead. For as we have already seen, the sacred realm does not consist only of formalized religion; on the contrary, popular reincarnations of ancient and contemporary myths can also act as potent motivators in a society. In fact, just when one begins to suspect that in a modern city like Bombay, all this rehashing of Vedic mythology is a lot of elitist cant, one suddenly realizes that less than a hundred yards away, in a hovel of a shanty town, a squatter family is actually reenacting their version of those very myths in the real crunch of everyday life.

Our habitat is not created in a vacuum; it is the compulsive expression of beliefs and aspirations (implicit or explicit) that are central to our lives. India today consists of an incredibly rich reservoir of images and beliefs, like the transparent layers of a palimpsest—with all the colors and all the patterns equally vivid—starting with the models of the cosmos and continuing down to the images of this century. And it is the continuing presence of these layers in our lives that creates the pluralism of our contemporary society. In this respect, India is different from, say, the United States. For although American society can also be described as increasingly pluralistic and multireligious, these are religions with most of their myths castrated—which is perhaps why in any college chapel or airport lounge you can use the same bare table for a Christian ceremony, followed by a Jewish one, then a Muslim, then a Buddhist, and so forth. This would be impossible in India! Here one sometimes feels that no myth has ever been diluted or lost. Today they all coexist, riding together into the sunset.

Their presence decisively shapes our behavior and influences our decisions. Certainly it encourages us, even in a crisis, to take the "soft" option, since a pluralistic construct allows us to avoid having to make a clear choice (nothing is either black or white). This palimpsest allows us to avoid confrontation in other ways as well. Consider, for instance, a typical bazaar. The apparent chaos and disorder here, on close observation, actually consists of several layers of order, all superimposed. Over the centuries, this "chaos" has functioned as a self-defense system, protecting society against agents of change. After all, how does one "improve" upon chaos? If you were to enter a room where all the tables and chairs were upside down and the beds unmade, you would hardly be able to decide precisely what modifications should be carried out—for the simple reason that you would not know what you were looking at. If, on the other hand, everything was in simplistic, apple-pie order, suggestions would leap to your mind. The room would be extremely vulnerable to your intervention as an agent of change. That is why, after two and a half centuries of trying, the British were not able to fundamentally restructure India. Essentially, and for much of the time, they didn't know what they were looking at! This is perhaps also the reason why Japan (which, as a society, has always been kept in spic-and-span order) could be changed so decisively, in just a handful of years, by General Douglas MacArthur. He could easily see what needed repositioning.

Another significant characteristic of chaos, or apparent chaos, is its metaphysical value. The Chinese have a high regard for what they call the Dragon of Disorder. They feel it helps to balance life. Perhaps it evokes in us an awareness of the nonmanifest. A few years ago, some urban design schemes were drawn up for the banks of the Tigris as it flows through the capital city of Baghdad—proposals somewhat similar to those of the beautiful manicured banks of the Seine around the Ile de la Cité in Paris. An Iraqi poet protested: where then would be the legendary Tigris of his youth, of ancient myth—a primordial river flowing through ambiguous and amorphous mud banks? His eloquence was very moving. I thought to myself: what would happen to Banaras if the Ganges River were redeveloped to look like the Seine? If you took the myriad activities that occur every day along the ghats—the ritualistic bathing of the pilgrims, the cremation of bodies, the reading of horoscopes by the astrologers, the chanting of the

Brahmin priests, and the boatloads of tourists clicking away with their cameras—if you took all these activities and placed them on the manicured quays of Paris, what would you get? The compound of a general hospital? The big scene of a disaster movie? In the context of Banaras, on the contrary, this tableau becomes a metaphor for the human condition. It makes you reflect on the metaphysics of life. Why is this? Precisely because the banks of the Ganges are ill defined and amorphous and because beyond all that human activity, on the far side of the holy river, the landscape stretches flat and enigmatic, onward to infinity.

This complex and ambiguous relationship between man and nature is central to Indian architecture. Europeans—starting with the ancient Greeks—have habitually conceived of architecture as a man-made object, complementing nature but quite separate from it. Hence, the Parthenon on the Acropolis in Athens: the quintessential object placed on the sacred mountain. Building and nature converse in harmonious dialogue but do not imitate each other. Most Western architecture, right down to this century, follows this paradigm. Hindu architecture never takes this extreme position; nor does it take its converse. Instead, we have the ambiguity of Ajanta—that stunning sweep of caves carved out of the mountain, each perpetually revolving in its place. Does Kailash destroy the mountain, or does it preserve it? Is it part of nature, or does it belong to man? Again, the philosophical pluralism that underlies the Vedas reveals itself, disdaining the dualities of simplistic choice.

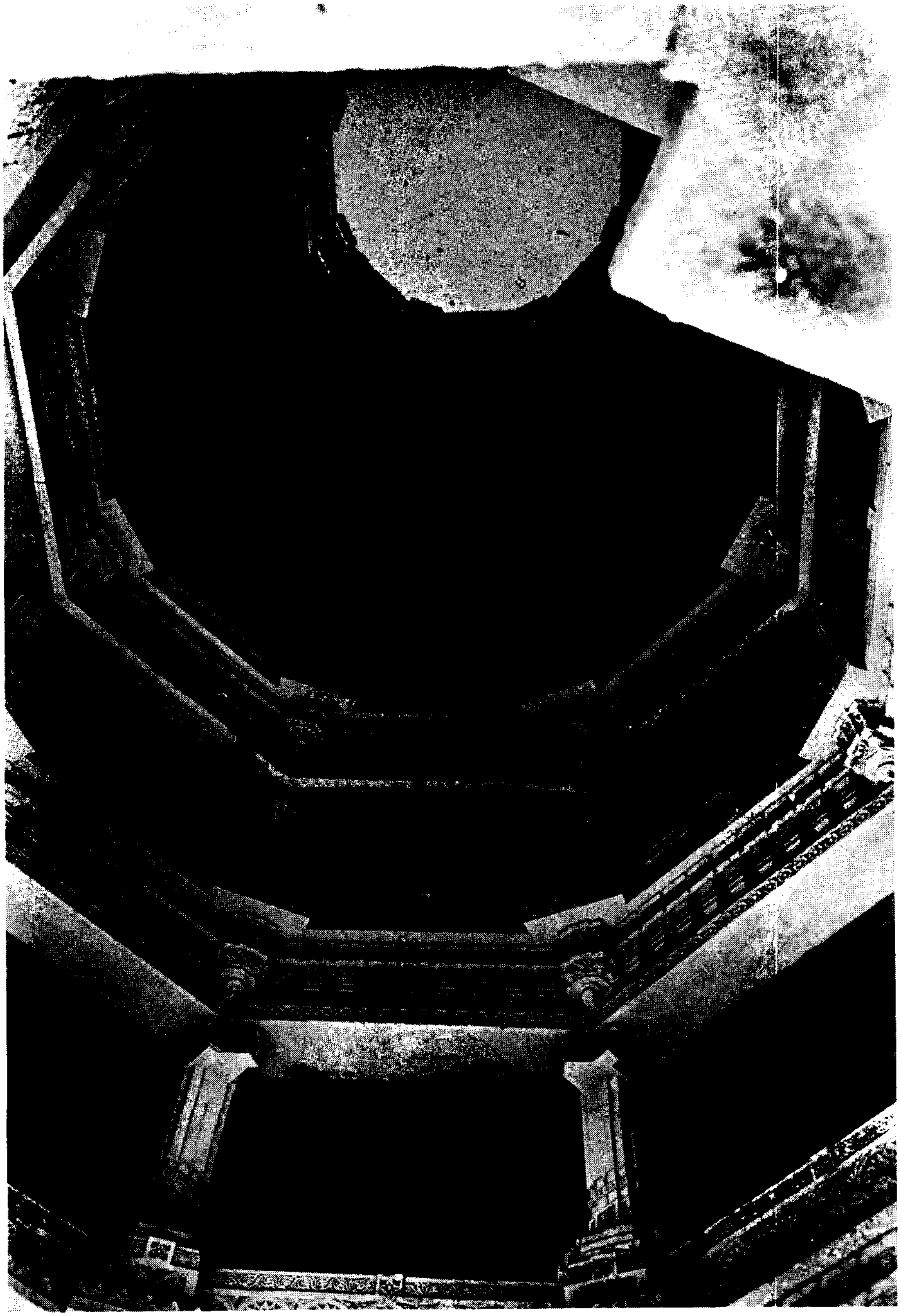
The mythic values of the past affect us not only on issues of monumental architecture but on those concerning basic issues of shelter as well—issues of vital importance to the millions of urban poor living in our squatter colonies. In Latin America, where the phenomenon of these settlements first surfaced, you can scan the age of a colony by the stages of improvement carried out by its inhabitants. (First the asbestos roof, then the TV antenna, then the lace curtains, and so forth). This is seldom true of India. Old squatter colonies, even those which have been legitimized by government fiat, do not look so different from brand-new ones. Not that there are no improvements but just that these are not as palpable as those in Latin America. Why? Because the hedonistic images of Mediterranean mythology place a premium on the *casa* as a symbol—and a focus—of good living.

Now, as was pointed out earlier, building models of the cosmos leads to austere and metaphysical builtform; it was the paradise garden that brought sensuous delight to Indian architecture and classical music. Because we are not hedonistic, visitors assume we are not materialistic. Not true. Indians are as materialistic as anyone else. The reason the family of a very wealthy businessman is living in two miserable rooms of a crowded *chawl* in Bombay is that his symbol of conspicuous consumption is not the size of his casa but, rather, the diamond earrings in his wife's ears.

This absence of hedonism is primarily the outcome of the belief, central to Hinduism, that this manifest world is not all there is. It is mere illusion. Thus, down the centuries, the model hero in India has never been he who wins all but he who renounces all. This prototype continues to beckon to countless millions of Indians—even as they get more and more acquisitive every day (just as the image of the archetypal cowboy—Henry Kissinger's experience notwithstanding—perpetuates the myth of the heroic individual in America). *Sanyas*, the oath of renunciation, is the third duty specified in the Vedic shastras, after those of being a student and then a householder. It represents an attitude understood throughout the length and breadth of this land—one central to Mahatma Gandhi's philosophy and to his political appeal. It is implicit in the historic photograph of his last possessions: the pair of spectacles, the bowl, the sandals, the trio of monkeys ("see no evil, speak no evil, hear no evil"). In this image Gandhiji (who, like the great Mao-Tse-Tung, had almost no visual sensibilities), has generated an aesthetic image of the highest order—one which makes vivid to us the issues of existence. If ever we are going to be able to construct the program (and more crucially, conceptualize the socioeconomic context, the intellectual mindset) needed to address the issues of the urban poor, it is this image of Gandhiji's last possessions that will provide the key.

And if ever we can summon the political will to enact this program, the people of India will respond. We cannot get rich overnight; poverty is going to be with us for some years to come, and our twenty-first century is less likely to be concerned about electronic wizardry than about the bitter struggle for human equity. For us in India, as for those in the Third World, those colossal waves of distress migration engulfing our towns and cities are going to occupy center stage—generating the overriding political and moral issues of the next five decades.

To deal with the questions they raise, we will have to learn how to transform mythic images and values and reinvent them in terms of new aspirations. We must enlarge our perspective so as to take cognizance of not only the public and private issues involved in our decisions but of the sacred ones as well. Together, these three realms can sensitize us not only to the manifest world that we can see and feel but also to the invisibilia that lie beneath.



Religion in India

T. N. Madan

In India, religion is like an axis that transforms as it turns, propelling society through history. Religion's many expressions—the Sikh, Jain, Hindu, Buddhist, Sant, and Muslim traditions—radiate like spokes, connecting with the social in one great wheel of the universe. The ways of dharma, karma, and bhakti enact its movement in everyday life; with secularism and pluralism, both evolving from these principles, Nehru and Mahatma Gandhi built the nation. Through its historical landscape, Indian society accompanies the spiritual in the same way that, according to an ancient text, a person's fortune sits, rises, and moves with him through life.

Ekam sat viprah bahudha vadanti. (The Truth is but one, though the learned state it in many ways.)
—Rig Veda
c. 1000 B.C.

Personally, I think the world as a whole will never have, and need not have, a single religion.
—Mahatma Gandhi
30 May 1913

To write about religion in India without querying the notion of religion as a discrete element of everyday life is to yield to the

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temptation of words. The point is not that the religious domain is not distinguished from the secular but rather that the secular is regarded as encompassed by the religious—even when considered opposed to it—and not independent of it. The relationship is hierarchical. That is, religion in this culture is constitutive of society, and the traditional vision of life is holistic. This is the first principle for any discussion of religion in India.

It is an irony of history that modern intellectuals, Indians as well as Westerners, have generally considered religion (or religiosity) the bane of the good enlightened life in South Asia and indeed everywhere. Considering the abuse of religion in our times, this opinion is not surprising. Thus, Jawaharlal Nehru wrote: "We have to get rid of that narrowing religious outlook, that obsession with the supernatural and metaphysical speculations, that loosening of the mind's discipline in ceremonial and mystical emotionalism, which come in the way of our understanding ourselves and the world."[1] Needless to emphasize, *understanding* here means comprehension in terms of Western rational thought.

There are other modern Indians who have wondered if the religious label that has stuck to Indian culture is genuine or only spurious. Dhurjati Prasad Mukerji (one of the founding fathers of sociology in India) wrote about fifty years ago: "Our material conditions, our political subjection, our nationalism conspire in the currency of the story started by the West for its own purposes that Indians, by and large, are . . . addicts to religion, that both the body and the soul of Indian culture are annexed and possessed by the Divinity."[2] He felt constrained to add, however, that those "progressives" in India who dismiss religion as the opium of the people not only ignore social facts but also "the historical process by which these have assumed the attached social values."[3]

Contrast these expressions of the negative or apologetic attitude toward religion with the characteristically simple but emphatic expression of faith by Mahatma Gandhi: "For me every, the tiniest, activity is governed by what I consider to be my religion."[4] For Gandhi and the millions of Indians he represented, religion was indeed constitutive of society. This is as true of Indian Muslims, for whom the ultimate reality is spiritual and for whom consequently there is no such thing as a profane world, as it is of the Sikhs, who deny the separation of spiritual goals from the pursuit of political power, and of the Hindus, who see the cosmos as a single whole, a unity, comprising all creation animated by one spirit.

Let me state here that I am inclined to believe that the religious, or traditional, view of life has not really been the source of conflict between peoples, that it is its perversion which has been so. The scope of interreligious understanding is, in my opinion, immense, and it is in no way contradicted by the holism of the religious traditions of mankind. And yet one surely may not turn a blind eye to the conflicts between religious communities which have for so long caused untold suffering to innocent people everywhere. The historicity of such conflicts does not, however, constitute an argument against religion or signify its irrelevance: it only points to the unrealized promise of cultural pluralism. The history of India is the history of syncretism among religious traditions as well as conflict between religious communities, and should have a great deal to tell us about both processes. It is therefore important that we read history carefully, for while the clash between obscurantist-revivalist ideologies has turned out to be not only barren but also bloody, secularism (in the Enlightenment sense of the term) has nowhere—not even in Europe—succeeded in providing a comprehensive alternative to the religious worldview. In fact, secularization has entailed the loss of meaning in human life about which Max Weber wrote so eloquently.

Now, all worldviews, whether religious or secular, have their metaphysical foundations, which are the basis and an integral component of social activity everywhere. In India, the root paradigm of all the major indigenous religious traditions is that of the cosmic moral social order, of *dharma*. It is to an interpretation of this that I now turn.

METAPHYSICS: DHARMA

Dharma, a Sanskrit word, is generally employed in contemporary writing in most Indian languages to stand for religion, but this usage is not satisfactory. According to Hinduism, Jainism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, the universe is sustained by dharma. The great Indian epic the Mahabharata (c. 400 B.C.– 400 A.D.) says: "Dharma is so called because it protects *dharnat* (everything); Dharma maintains everything that has been created; Dharma is thus that very principle which can maintain the universe."[5] Today, we do not need old texts or modern philosophers to tell us that "next to the category of reality, that of dharma is the most important concept in Indian thought."[6] Almost every Hindu, Jain, Buddhist, or Sikh, even if he is illiterate and of humble origin, knows that dharma is the foundation of the good life. Whether this is seen naively as an instance of equal social distribution of knowledge, or critically as the hegemonic imposition of the thought of the Brahmins on others, the fact remains that *dharma* is a rich word of everyday speech in India. This does not, however, mean that its meaning is easily conveyed in non-Indian languages. It is broader and more complex than the Christian notion of religion and less jural than our current conceptions of duty. It emphasizes awareness and freedom rather than the notion of *religio*, or obligation.

A concept of multiple connotations, dharma includes cosmological, ethical, social, and legal principles that provide the basis for the notion of an ordered universe. In the social context, it stands for the imperative of righteousness in the definition of the good life. More specifically, dharma refers to the rules of social intercourse laid down traditionally for every category of actor (or moral agent) in terms of social status (*varna*), the stage of life (*ashrama*), and the qualities of inborn nature (*guna*). Put simply, for every person there is a mode of conduct that is most appropriate: it is his or her *svadharma*, which may be translated as "vocation." The emphasis here is upon legitimacy in terms of authenticity; and authenticity flows from one's social position and physical nature; external coercion is of no real value. So much so indeed that the Bhagavad Gita (c. 200 B.C.–200 A.D.), which is in our times the most widely known text of the Hindu tradition, repeatedly exhorts the actor to prefer failure in the pursuit of his vocation to success in someone else's role. Action to which one is born arises spontaneously and is easily performed: it is not a burden. When one achieves such a state of dharmic existence or moral perfection—the mystic Jiddu Krishnamurti called it "choiceless awareness"—contexts are dissolved, specificities disappear, dualities are transcended, and what survives is a seamless moral sensibility.

Many scholars—Indians as well as foreigners—have commented on the absence of "natural law" from Hindu thought and its alleged ethical relativism. What I have just said about the dissolution of contexts may be seen to underscore this problem rather than to resolve it. It is therefore relevant to mention here that the Hindu tradition does in fact entertain the notion of universally applicable law, *sadharan* or *samanya* dharma, which is the foundation for all specific dharmas. Thus, untruthfulness, wanton killing, stealing, sexual assault, or self-seeking endeavor at the cost of others may never be justified under any circumstances, though the punishment for transgression is not the same in all cases. Similarly, forgiveness, application to work, sincerity, personal cleanliness, and moral watchfulness are virtues that Hinduism calls for everybody to cultivate. The charge of ethical relativism does not really hold. Moreover, the unease of modern scholars when faced with complex Indian traditions is a result of their distrust of pluralism; but pluralism is not a self-evident moral flaw; it is in fact the strength of many non-Western ethical traditions.

Dharma as the foundation of the good life consists of the rational pursuit of economic and political goals (*artha*) as well as pleasure (*kama*). Taken together, these three constitute the goals of life (*purushartha*), and are hierarchically related: the pursuit of pleasure ought to be subordinated to economic and political goals and to dharma, and the pursuit of economic and political goals must likewise conform to dharma. In other words, one must avoid the acquisition of wealth and the gratification of desires if they involve the violation of dharma.

Although only three principal goals of life are mentioned in the earlier texts, a significantly different fourth goal is discussed at much length in the Mahabharata and has since remained prominent. This is the goal of *moksha*, or freedom through transcendence from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, and therefore from the pursuit of the other three goals. Dharma, inclusive of artha and kama, is a grand design of life, and moksha is the alternative. There is no contradiction here. Dharma is the basis of the householder's life, which is highly prized. Its repudiation is renunciation, or *sannyasa*. Ideally, however, one may become a renouncer only after fulfilling the obligations of householdership. As for the renouncer himself, he too is bound but by his own dharma.

Non-Indian students of the Hindu way of life have been deeply impressed with renunciation as an ideal for personal life just as they have been by the caste system as a framework for social life. Hindus themselves acknowledge the fascination with renunciation, and yet postpone it to the very end of a person's life as its fourth stage, after the stages of study, householdership, and retirement. In fact, only a microscopic minority actually renounce the world. Not only is the renouncer a theatrical figure, dressed in ocher robe, carrying his staff and begging bowl, a living embodiment of self-control and asceticism; he is also an exemplar of values. As the French social anthropologist Louis Dumont has reminded us, renouncers have often been founders of sects in the caste-based Hindu society.[7]

Perhaps because this ideal is so noble and lofty, reverence for it as an ideal is combined with a healthy skepticism about real-life renouncers. Hindu tradition stresses the importance of overcoming dualistic choices and the possibility of doing so without renouncing, by means of detachment and the overcoming of all passions. Sociologically, the householder who follows dharma is the true hero. Everyday the renouncer knocks at his front door, asking for alms: by his very presence, he invites the householder to renounce the world. And he hears equally often, if not oftener, the muffled yet powerful knock of the sensualist at his back door, as it were, tempting him to a life of pleasure. The householder's heroism lies in the good sense of the middle path, which the Katha Upanishad tells us is sharp like the razor's edge.[8]

The middle path (*madhyamika*) is also what is extolled above all in the Buddhist tradition. It comprises "the noble eightfold path" based on "the four noble truths." Gotama the Buddha (563–483 B.C.), in his first sermon at Sarnath to the five disciples who had stood by him, set in motion, as the Buddhists say, "the wheel of the cosmic law of righteousness" (*dhammachakka*). The enlightened Gotama stressed the folly of the pursuit of pleasure, for it produces pain and suffering. The first truth of life, he said, is sorrow; the second, that the source of sorrow is desire; the third, that sorrow can be ended if craving is eliminated; and the fourth, that the eightfold path leads to *nibanna*, the "blowing out" of both desire and suffering. We see that no sooner had the seer stated the truth than he pointed to action in a striking unity of the theory and the art of life.

The noble eightfold path is, then, dharma (*dhamma* in Pali). It consists of right views, right resolve, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration. This exhortation in all its nobility and severity is addressed to the monk who seeks refuge in the community of monks. Monks and lay Buddhists seek the protection of the Buddha and dhamma. Dhamma is equally acknowledged as the foundation of the universe by all schools of Buddhism—Hinayana, Mahayana, and Theravada.

It would be an oversimplification to treat the Buddhist dhamma and the Hindu dharma as essentially the same, though they are similar. For one thing, the Buddhist notion of cosmic and moral law is in no way whatsoever linked with any notion of the supernatural, while such an association acquires increasing importance in the history of Hinduism. Moreover, the hierarchical triad of dharma, artha, and kama is significantly restated so as to stress that dharma as the cosmic law, or the Truth, absolutely encompasses the righteousness of the ruler. Dhamma is indeed called the "king of the righteous king." It is this absolutist conception of dhamma that resulted in the elevation of nonviolence (*ahimsa*) and compassion as supreme values.

In Jainism ahimsa forms the very core of dharma; indeed, ahimsa is dharma. There is also a special use of the term, according to which it denotes a spatial category in Jain physics—the space in which movement takes place. Movement is central to Jain practice in many ways; as moral exertion, it is the essence of life. In its more basic sense, dharma in the Jain tradition is the eternal law of respect for life; and for the Jains life is an attribute of practically everything that exists, including earth, water, and wind, so even the wind must not be harmed. As far as possible, nothing must be destroyed.

The notion of destroying or killing to protect dharma was, however, developed within the Hindu tradition. The war described in the Mahabharata is called the dharmic war. In fact the Bhagavad Gita puts forward the notion of *avatar*, or divine incarnation, as a means of destroying the wicked and restoring dharma. This idea has been incorporated into the Sikh tradition also.

Sikhs employ the word *dharam* (dharma) to describe their way of life, which is the same for all Sikhs irrespective of differences of social origin or personal conditions. It is a universally applicable code of conduct taught by the Divine Preceptor (*guru*) and expressing the Divine Commandment (*hukam*). Nanak, the founder of the Sikh faith, spoke of the five "domains" (*khanda*) that constitute what I would call "life space." Of these, the first is dharma, or moral duty. The others are the domains of spiritual knowledge, human effort, divine benevolence, and truth. Sikh men consider it a moral duty to carry a small sword (*kirpan*) on their person to symbolize both the divinity and the individual's determination to kill or be killed in the defense of dharma. The congregational prayer of the Sikhs includes a reference to those who "offered their heads at the altar of dharma."

An examination of the notions of dharma in India's cultural traditions reveals that in the earliest formulations it had less to do with supernatural powers or rituals than with human activity and the moral integrity of the actor. The notion of a supreme being or divinity has remained alien to Jainism and Buddhism, but it gradually gained ground in the Hindu tradition. By the time the Bhagavad Gita came to be composed, the idea of dharma being divinely instituted and protected had become established.

According to the Manusmriti (c. 200 A.D.), there are four sources of dharma—namely, the original teaching, remembered traditions, the conduct of good people, and personal judgment. Whether what was originally taught and heard is revelation and, if so, whether revealed knowledge is to be traced to a divine origin are questions that have been long debated within the tradition but need not detain us here. More important, surely, is the mutual relationship between the four sources. A narrow exegesis of the texts might suggest a descending order of preference, but a more insightful interpretation would look upon the sources as a matrix of interacting factors. Dharma is not law or custom or conscience but all these in different combinations.[9] Some of the truly significant interpretations of dharma have been provided by those who defied tradition and sought to discover it in their own conscience or, to put it differently, in moral reason. This is what Yuddhishthira, the hero of the Mahabharata, did; in our own time this is what Mahatma Gandhi did. And surely it is this acknowledgment of the superiority of moral reason to customary usage that underlies the power of the notion of dharma: it not only sustains but also transforms society.

PRAXIS: KARMA

Dharma as the abstract principle of the social order is a metaphysical concept. As a disposition of the mind, it is a subjective quality. As metaphysics and as psychology, it has practical consequences—namely, the obligation and the tendency to act in a particular way in specified situations. The synthesis of thought and action—of theory and practice—is even more clearly expressed in the notion of *karma*, another key concept of India's indigenous cultural traditions.

Dharma and karma are inseparable and in certain contexts indistinguishable. If dharma is the social consensus about the good life, karma is the individual actor's effort to live according to it.

Karma literally means action. The Bhagavad Gita makes creativity obligatory for the Supreme Being himself, for if he did not act, the world would fall into ruins and there would be chaos.[10] Divine creation is thus the paradigmatic karmic act. For human beings, the emphasis is on tasks to be accomplished, on desires to be fulfilled. The tasks may be traditionally commanded; the desires or goals are often empirically motivated. Traditionally, karma is said to be of three kinds—of the body, of speech, and of the mind—but it is best when it is all three together. The karmic act is value neutral. While *adharma* would mean evil, the opposite of dharma, the opposite of karma is absence of karma (*akarma*). It follows that while dharma produces dharma, the consequences of particular karmic acts may be meritorious or evil. This is the notion of the fruits of action, of compensation or retribution, which was regarded by Max Weber as "the unique Hindu theodicy" of the existing social order.[11] He saw in karma the nearest that one could get to doctrinal belief in Hinduism, revealing more about his own Christian anxieties, perhaps, than about Indic cultures. Be that as it may, karma does stand for what may loosely be called a theory.

In all Indian cultural traditions, human actions have consequences that are inescapable. The fruits of action bring joy or sorrow depending on whether certain actions have been good or evil. Whatever cannot be enjoyed or suffered in the present life must be experienced hereafter in another birth, which may not be a human birth. To be born a human being is a rare privilege because it is only through such a birth that a soul may be freed from reincarnation.

An emphasis on the metaphysics of karma characterizes Western scholarship on India in our own time no less than in the late nineteenth century. Within the indigenous Hindu discourse, however, the emphasis is on pragmatics, on karma *in* action or *as* action. This is particularly true of the original Buddhist teaching. According to it, everybody is the architect, here and now, of his own destiny, for better or worse, depending on the moral choices he makes. The notion of karmic legacy is rejected. The Jains do, however, entertain the notion of karmic burden, which they seek to "burn up" through the practice of severe austerities (something that the Buddha clearly disapproved of). They conceive of karma as a substance that accumulates in the process of transmigration and envelops the soul as a form of matter.

The Hindu concept of karma is, however, essentially pragmatic. Ask an orthodox Hindu about karma and he is more likely to talk of it as ritual than as abstract belief. In his life millennia of experience are summed up. Thus, karma will stand for prayer and worship addressed to favorite gods and goddesses: this is the popular ritual called *puja*. Its origins go back three thousand years, when the early Vedic seers, overwhelmed by the power of nature and by its beauty, anthropomorphized it—saw aspects of it as gods—and prayed to these gods for boons and protection. (Incidentally, the Vedic chant is said to be the beginning of the northern and southern Indian classical music systems.)

Later, in the evolution of Hinduism, karma became identified with sacrificial rituals that were believed to produce results simply because the rituals were performed and not because they were offerings to deities or merely mediating links between human beings and supernatural powers. It was against such intense and exacting ritualism, and the attendant power of ritual specialists, that the Buddha revolted two and a half thousand years ago. During the post-Buddhist revival, the great eighth-century Hindu Vedantist philosopher from South India, Shankara, uncompromisingly downgraded ritualism and placed the way of knowledge and wisdom high above it as a means to spiritual good. Seven hundred years later, a devout Hindu householder of North India, Nanak, taught his disciples, the Sikhs, the superiority of moral righteousness over mechanical ritualism. And yet rituals have not wholly disappeared from the life of the Hindus or the Sikhs. In fact, rituals define these and other religion-suffused ways of life all over South Asia, but they do so in a rather flexible way.

Rituals thus survive as rites of passage. Every Hindu, no matter what caste or community he belongs to, is the subject of rituals at birth, marriage, and death. Such rituals are intended for the moral refinement of the individual. Life-cycle rituals constitute *samskara*, that is, the process whereby one is "made complete or perfect" and, ultimately after death, transformed into an ancestor. As an ancestor, one is in contact with one's descendants through the rituals of feeding that the latter perform. If the ancestors are not at peace, there will be no births. Rituals protect the seed and the fetus. They give the newborn child her individual and social identity. They bestow on the so-called "twice-born" Hindus their upper-caste status. In marriage, as a Vedic hymn puts it, parental love gives way to conjugal love: love gives, love receives, and with love is the ocean of life filled. The so-called rites of passage are in fact rituals of transformation and continuity in one great chain of being. They are supplemented by rituals that protect the body against disease and physical dangers. There are also the expiatory rituals of atonement and moral purification.

Important as karma (in the foregoing sense of ritual) is, it is not self-sufficient. Man is ever in need of divine favor and one seeks this through puja and pilgrimage. Puja, the ritual of adoration, may be performed at home or in a temple. Its recipient is one's favorite deity—Shiva, Vishnu, or Devi—iconically represented and treated as an honored guest. It is bathed, anointed, fed, entertained with song and dance, praised and prayed to, and put to bed. While sacrificial rituals also were performed to win divine favor, puja emerged as a distinctive mode of worship characterized by intensity of emotion. Although the home was regarded as good as the temple for this purpose, the latter enjoyed a special status.

Temple art and architecture of ancient and medieval India survive to bear witness to the primacy of the religious over the secular in Hindu society. According to an old Tamil saying, one should not build a house in a town without a temple. Even kings obviously paid greater attention to the temple than to the palace: as a rule the palace had to be lower than a temple and the Brahmins' houses lower than the palace. The temple was the center of the town. Its spire, visible from a long distance, indicated its very existence. The temples in turn took interest in mundane affairs, using their landed and other forms of wealth to promote the economic well-being of the priestly class and occasionally and derivatively of the larger community as well. As is well known, temples provided loans and promoted irrigation in South India.

Prayers are also offered at sacred spots such as the source of a river or the meeting place of rivers. Every day in India Hindu pilgrims walk to some such sacred place (*tirtha*), an *axis mundi*, far away from home, to wash off their moral impurities and attain merit. To go on a pilgrimage one becomes a "wanderer" (a *yatrika*) for the specific purpose of accumulating merit. In a well-known ancient text, we hear the god Indra, presiding deity of pilgrims, pronounce the following exhortation: "The fortune of him who is sitting, sits; it rises when he rises; it sleeps when he sleeps; it moves when he moves. Therefore, wander!"[12] Indeed, going on pilgrimages, particularly to highly esteemed places, and on particularly auspicious occasions, is scripturally recommended karma. Thus, every twelve years, on the astrologically auspicious occasion called Kumbha, millions of Hindus visit the holy city of Prayag in North India at the confluence of the rivers Ganga and Jamna. All of India gathers there, as it were. Walking together, bathing together, or having *darshan* (seeing an image or icon) together, each pilgrim is yet alone in the crowd: being a pilgrim is an intensely personal experience.[13]

The practice of pilgrimage knows no community barriers. The Jains are the pilgrims par excellence, always on the move visiting temples and holy places. The most notable among the latter is Shravana Belgola in South India, where the world's largest monolith, the sixty-foot image of Gomateshvara, a Jain spiritual teacher, sculpted late in the tenth century, is venerated daily and especially at periodic festivals. The Buddhists from India and abroad go on pilgrimage to Bodh Gaya, where Gotama received enlightenment, or to Sarnath, where he preached his first sermon, or to Kandy in Sri Lanka, where the holy relic of his tooth is venerated. Similarly, Sikh pilgrims from India and elsewhere go on pilgrimage to Nankana Sahab, the birthplace of Nanak, in Pakistan. For Muslims anywhere, one of the five key religious obligations is, of course, to visit Mecca if they have the means to make it; but practically every Muslim in India goes on pilgrimage to the shrine of one Sufi saint or another within a reasonable distance of where he lives. As modern means of communication and transportation become available more generally, holy places attract larger numbers of pilgrims (and also secularly minded tourists, since many of these shrines are scenic or architecturally interesting).

For the Hindu in search of liberation from the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth, the karmic store of accumulated merit is a trap—hence the appeal of renouncing all worldly karma. But this ideal—itself probably a reversal of an earlier notion that one needs more than a lifetime to fully partake of worldly joys—is difficult to achieve. It is in this context that the teaching of the Bhagavad Gita acquires critical importance. Emphasizing the performance rather than the abandonment of karma, it teaches the ethics of altruism. If one performs one's duty in a spirit of sacrifice, eliminating one's ego and self-interest, one is liberated from the fruits of action even before death. One of the most crucial statements in the Bhagavad Gita bears on this point: "Your entitlement is to karma alone, never to its fruits. The hope of such fruit should not therefore be the motive for action, nor should one therefore become inactive."[14] In the twentieth century, Mahatma Gandhi has been the most distinguished teacher of this view of karma. He added a note of caution, however, for those who would endeavor to convert this precept into practice: without surrender to divine will as an act of devotion, the Mahatma taught, the practice of karma yoga will not succeed.

AGAPE: BHAKTI

Vedic polytheism and ritualism gave way to Upanishadic philosophizing about the metaphysics of the act. There was a transformation then rather than a sharp break, an attempted synthesis rather than a flat repudiation. Still later, the Bhagavad Gita acknowledged both ritual and knowledge as legitimate ways to attain self-realization, which, according to Hindu tradition, is the highest goal of human life. To the ways of action (karma) and intelligence (*jnana*), the Gita added the way of devotion (*bhakti*), thus reviving the theistic element that post-Vedic Hinduism had played down. After describing the ways of action, knowledge, and devotion, the Bhagavad Gita in its penultimate verse (chapter 18, verse 66) enjoins the seeker to abandon all three ways and to seek refuge in God so as to be free of the burden of all moral imperfections. This call to total surrender is as much intellectual as it is devotional. It was an idea fashioned by the Brahmins, the guardians of the sacred tradition and the ideologues of Hindu society.

A thousand years later (toward the close of the eighth century) a devotional movement flowered in South India among non-Brahmin groups, who gave it utterance in Tamil rather than Sanskrit, which the Brahmins called the language of the gods. These groups represented a longing for theism after centuries of Jain and Buddhist influence had swept over India, pushing the existence of God into the sidelines of religious thought and practice. They also expressed a moral weariness about the dharmas of caste and gender and sought to transcend such relativism by concentrating on personal devotion to their favorite deities. Shiva devotees took the lead, but Vishnu devotees followed soon later. The latter came to be known as Alvars—that is, those with an intuitive knowledge of God who were engaged in contemplative "immersion" in him. These devotional movements became widespread, embracing high castes as well as low by the end of the eleventh century.

The best known among the Alvars is Nammalvar. In his "hymns for the drowning" (to use A. K. Ramanujan's felicitous phrase),[15] Nammalvar puts forward a novel notion of devotion as the assumption of femininity by the devotee in relation to the one supremely noble man, Vishnu. While the Upanishads taught man to realize his own divinity and the Bhagavad Gita advised surrender, the Alvars stressed either the constant companionship of God or separation from him and the consequent longing, amorous in character, for union with him. But the preoccupation is with separation (*viraha*). While other Alvars covered a wide range of emotions, including those experienced by parents, sons, companions, servants, and women in love, Nammalvar sang particularly of the last of these:

Is that you, little bird?
When I asked you to go
as my messenger to the great lord
and tell him of my pain, you
dawdled, didn't go.
I have lost my looks,
my dark limbs are pale.
Go look for someone else
to put sweet things in your beak,
go now.[16]

The intoxication of love found expression among the devotees of Shiva in South India. The pangs of separation are typically described thus by Mahadevi, a woman from Karnataka who was a devotee in the twelfth century:

Four parts of the day
I grieve for you.
Four parts of the night
I'm mad for you.

I lie lost,
sick for you, night and day.
O Lord white as jasmine.

Describing the imagined ecstasy of union, she sang:

He bartered my heart,
looted my flesh,
claimed as tribute
my pleasure,
took over
all of me.
I'm the woman of love
for my lord, white as jasmine.[17]

The most celebrated Sanskrit text of *viraha bhakti* is the Bhagavata Purana (ninth century), which was most probably composed in South India. It contains much metaphysics and, laying particular stress on his childhood and youth, tells the tale of Krishna, the most illustrious avatar of Vishnu. Stories of his dalliance with young cowherdesses occupy a central place in the bhakti tradition, for the love of these women for Krishna is seen to symbolize the love of all devotees for God or, more abstractly, the longing of the individual soul for merger with the supreme soul, of which it is an emanation. This love, while all-consuming and incessant, is totally selfless and therefore pure. The Bhagavata Purana describes nine modes of bhakti: "Listening to the Lord's glory, singing of Him, thinking of Him, serving His feet, performing His worship, saluting Him, serving Him, friendship with Him, surrendering oneself to Him."[18]

The story of the unmarried love of Krishna and the cowherdess Radha has had wide influence all over India. Many Vaishnava sects owe their origin to it. In the late twelfth century in eastern India, the poet Jayadeva composed a religious-erotic poem of great beauty (the celebrated and much translated Gita Govinda), describing the love of Radha and Krishna, their separation and eventual reunion. Soon this poem became a part of temple worship and was set to music. It became an expression of spiritual quest. Gradually it spread to southern and western India and was incorporated in temple dance and music.

Later, in the sixteenth century, a Bengali devotee called Chaitanya became possessed with the love of Krishna and identified himself with

Radha agonizing over the pangs of separation from the Lord. Dancing and singing along with his followers, he traveled all the way to Vrindavan in North India, where, according to legend, Krishna had been born and had spent his youth. This dance-song form of worship with the agony of love as its theme came to be called *kirtan*. Chaitanya looked upon union with fear and even hatred, for it is in separation that the devotee, with all his or her senses, experiences God. In Gujarat, a contemporary of Chaitanya called Vallabha composed a treatise on aesthetic theory as a commentary on the love-play of Krishna as narrated in the Bhagavata Purana. Vallabha spoke of the complementarity of "total love" and "constraint." For him, bhakti was the contemplative endeavor of achieving union but the search for it was superior to finding it, so one must hold oneself back and experience in separation the love of God in full measure.

Bhakti imagined as conjugal love found its most poignant expression in the deeply moving lyrics of Mira, a Rajasthan princess of the late sixteenth century. While for Mahadevi Shiva had been the lover, for Mira Krishna was the longed-for husband. The pain of separation was no more bearable for that reason: "I will build myself a pyre of fragrant wood and beseech you to set it aflame with your own hand. The fire will consume me and I will be a heap of ashes. Won't you rub your body with the ashes, in the manner of the mendicant?"

Intense religious emotion found other kinds of expression also. In the sixteenth century, Sur sang joyously in Brijbhasha (a dialect of Hindi) of Krishna, child and young man, and Tulsi composed in Avadhi (another dialect of Hindi) the epic story of Rama, avatar of Vishnu, originally written in Sanskrit (c. 200 B.C.). Tulsi's bhakti was that of the servant (*dasa*) devoted to the service of his divine master. The love of God for the devotee, who dwells on his own imperfections and therefore on divine grace, is a central theme of Tulsi's sublime poetry. His *Ramacharitamanas* is a widely read, recited, and enacted vernacular religious text in India.

Sur, Tulsi, and Kabir, another devotee from a century earlier, are not only luminaries of the medieval bhakti movement but also the three great pillars of Hindi literature, a fact that draws our attention once again to the all-encompassing nature of religion in India. Kabir's devotionalism was centered not on a personalized god in human form, however, but on an abstract and formless conception of the divine. He considered the religious experience more important than its ground in some conception of a divinity. Alongside bhakti Kabir echoed the metaphysics of the Upanishads and reflected in some measure the influence of Sufi ideas on his upbringing as a Muslim.

SYNCRETISM: SUFIS, SANTS, AND SIKHS

Hinduism, Buddhism, and Jainism are indigenous religious traditions: it is from India that they—particularly Buddhism—have spread to other parts of Asia and the world. Buddhism was practically wiped out of India by the eighth century but only after many of its ideas and ideals had been absorbed into Hindu thought. In fact, the Buddha was deified by the Hindus, not by the Buddhists. Jainism has remained very close to Hinduism, especially in the realm of practice. In terms of the number of adherents, however, it is Islam that has become the second most important religion of India. In fact, there are more Muslims in India now (about eighty million) than in any other country except Indonesia.

Islam was brought to India by Arab traders toward the close of the seventh century, within living memory of the prophet Muhammad. Subsequently, the conquerors came and with them, the "doctors" of Muslim law called the *Ulama*. They stressed the realization of the true spirit of Islam through submission to "the way" (*sharia*) God had ordained for his true followers and faith in the example and sayings of Muhammad. Simultaneously, the Sufi seekers of God also came to India. They tended to keep aloof from the kings, but the kings often sought them out. The Sufis evolved their own way (*tariqa*) of realizing God—through love and the intermediary role of saints. The chasm between sharia and tariqa, between the Ulama and the Sufis, has been a factor of immense importance in the history of Islam in India. While the original tradition emphasized living in faith through the material world, the Sufi quest was essentially spiritual. "If knowledge strikes the heart," the Sufis taught, "it is welcome: if it strikes the body it is a burden." The idea of realizing the true nature of God, and even attempting to become one with him, was anathema to the Ulama, who denounced many Sufi orders as heretical. The Sufis' quest was, however, very similar to that of the Upanishadic seers: the latter's *soham* ("I am He") was echoed by the former's *anal-haqq* ("I am Truth").

The scope for religious syncretism was not perceived immediately. In fact, anti-Hindu polemics were characteristic of Indian Sufism in the pre-Mughal period. Leaders of various Sufi orders were active in converting Hindus to Islam. Kashmir and Bengal, where mass conversions took place, were won over by Sufis no less than by kings. The promise of syncretism was realized better in areas such as Bengal, where Hindu mythology and cosmology became the vehicles for Islamic dogmas and practices. As Bengal was Islamized, Islam itself became Hinduized. Muhammad's biography became a variant of Krishna's early life; Hindu gods rubbed shoulders with Muslim saints. In the heartland of India, two royal brothers, Dara Shukoh and Aurangzeb, the former a disciple of the Sufis, and the latter of the Ulama and the more orthodox Sufis, fought the battle to the finish. The Ulama won. This is perhaps the most critical event in the history of Islam in India, and I will describe it in some detail.

Dara Shukoh (1605–1659), son of Shah Jahan, was great grandson of the Mughal emperor Akbar, who had valiantly tried to bring the various religions of his realm together. But the special hall for discussions among scholars professing different faiths that Akbar had had built in his capital city of Fatehpur-Sikri ended up being a hall of disharmony, a Tower of Babel. Not to be defeated, Akbar assumed the role of religious leader and formally promulgated a new religion combining elements of Islam, Christianity, and Upanishadic Hinduism. But this too failed, and Akbar's "religion of God," which never made much headway beyond the court except to antagonize the Ulama, died with him in 1605.

In his zeal for religious syncretism, Dara Shukoh was Akbar's true heir and also a scholar of the religious classics of Islam and Hinduism. Taking his stand on the revelation in the Koran that God had sent his messengers to all peoples and given them their scriptures, Shukoh maintained that it was the moral duty of a Muslim to learn from these other religious traditions. He believed that the Upanishads must be the "concealed scripture" spoken of in verse 56, lines 77–80 of the Koran. He considered them, as such, the original source of monotheism. Not surprisingly, he translated the Bhagavad Gita and a number of Upanishads into Persian. He maintained that the translation was intended to clarify the Koranic revelation, not to devalue it. He also wrote a treatise on comparative religion, in which he compared the technical terms of Upanishadic pantheism with what he believed, perhaps mistakenly, to be their equivalents in Sufi thought. Apart from his Sufi preceptors, Dara consulted Brahmins as well as Hindu mystics and saints.

Dara's younger brother, Aurangzeb, disapproved of Akbar and Dara's quest for religious syncretism. Getting the Ulama to pronounce Dara an apostate, for maintaining, among other things, that Islam and Hinduism were "twin brothers," Aurangzeb had Dara executed in 1659. For Aurangzeb, Islam and Hinduism were as irreconcilable as truth and error. The Akbar-Dara quest for interreligious understanding was not, however, a total failure. It gradually led to a change in the attitudes of some Sufi orders (notably, the Qadiri with whom Dara was associated and later the Naqshbandi with whom Aurangzeb had his ties). They moved from hostility to tolerance and even understanding of Hinduism. In fact, the exclusive and syncretic tendencies ran parallel to each other, often in the thought and action of the same person. After reading the Bhagavad Gita, Shah Abdul Aziz, for example, who was at the forefront of the "purifiers" of Indian Islam and worked for the return of Sufi orders to orthodoxy, also regarded Krishna as a saint.

If the Akbar-Dara experiment had succeeded, perhaps Hinduism would have evolved in a manner consistent with its monotheistic potential and Islam would have been absorbed into it just as the Buddhist and Jain heterodoxies had been. But these changes did not occur. The role of Sufism in bringing Islam and Hinduism close together must not be overestimated. Even the outstanding contributions of the gifted Sufi Amir Khusrau in the late thirteenth century to a composite literary and musical culture, and his obvious pride in being an Indian, did nothing to soften his ambivalence about, if not hostility toward, Hinduism.

Some contemporary Indian thinkers, confronting history with metaphysics, maintain that a synthesis between Hinduism and Islam was never truly possible and that the only genuine alternatives available to the Hindus were either to fight Islam to the last man or to embrace it. They did neither. The lure of synthesis, according to these scholars, turned out to be poisonous and corrupted the Hindu way of life. In terms of the fundamentals of belief and practice, their opinion is true, but then compromises are the very stuff of history. The powerful Hindu image of the awesome god Shiva holding poison in his throat is itself an image of compromise. The unthinkable (namely synthesis) did take place in medieval India and not only in art and architecture, painting and music, language and literature, but also in religion and philosophy—though in a much more limited way in the latter than in the former three domains.

And yet the coming of Islam was indeed a revolutionary event: it broke the ancient bond between India and her indigenous religious traditions. Although Christianity had arrived here with the apostle Thomas, who established the Syrian church in southwestern India, it had not sued for the state, and no Christian kingdoms were established. It is in this sense that the coming of Muslims to India was an invasion.

Cultural synthesis at the high philosophical level had its counterpart at the popular level. The latter in fact anticipated the former and was also more successful. Kabir, whom I have already mentioned in connection with bhakti, had preceded Dara Shukoh by almost a hundred years. Looking back, social historians consider him the originator of a new religious tradition, namely the Sant tradition. The word *Sant* is derived from the Sanskrit *sat* for "truth" or "reality," and means one who knows the Truth or who has experienced Reality.

Rejecting the external authority of the Vedas and the Koran, Kabir, who was brought up in a Muslim family, preached the goal of inner realization based on the love of a transcendent and formless divinity. He was influenced by Vaishnava bhakti primarily but also by yogic and Sufi ideas and practices, such as the ideals of self-perfection and the oneness of God respectively, and the meditative recitation of God's name as an expression of one's love for him, common to both Hindu devotees and Muslim Sufis. His followers were drawn mostly from lower, often untouchable, Hindu castes, and included Muslims. The latter saw him as an exponent of the Sufi notion of the "unity of being" (*wahdat-al-wujud*).

The Sants stressed the fulfillment of essential social obligations such as the need to support one's family through personal effort. Kabir himself is said to have practiced the craft of weaving. Although socially involved, the Sants advocated an inner detachment from worldly ties. Seeking a true guru, keeping the company of like-minded seekers, and dedicating themselves to the incessant remembrance of God, they abandoned traditional rituals and rejected caste and religous barriers. Their creed of love embraced humanity as well as the abstract supreme being. Rabindranath Tagore called this the religion of man. Sociologically, the Sant reformation is important because it gave birth to a large number of sects in northern, central, and western India. Many of these sects, including the Kabir Panth, survive until today.

One sect that was to grow into a world religion was that of the followers of Nanak (1469–1539) in the Punjab. Born a clean-caste Hindu, deeply influenced by the Sant tradition as well as by Upanishadic metaphysics, and clearly aware of the teachings of Islam and the practice of the Nath Yogis (members of a Hindu sect who focus on self-perception and inner awareness), Nanak revolted against ritualism and caste rigidities, particularly the former. He also sought to combine elements from the various religious traditions of India and to transcend them. Worship of and submission to the will of God, honest labor, and collective sharing of the fruits of labor are believed to be the principles of his teaching. His companions and followers came to be called Nanak Panthis as well as Sikhs (disciples, or learners), and their religious tradition, the Sikh dharma.

Nanak was the first guru of the Sikhs. He was followed by nine others. The Mughal emperor Akbar was tolerant of the new sect and is believed even to have visited the third guru. The political environment after Akbar's death became increasingly hostile under the Naqshbandi Sufi reaction to Akbar's alleged apostasy. Sikh tradition holds Jahangir (Akbar's son) responsible for the death of the fifth guru. Around the same time the social composition of the Sikh community, which had been confined largely to a small number of clean Hindu castes, also changed. The large-scale entry of low-caste Jat agriculturalists into the Sikh fold contributed to the shaping of its militant character. The original pietist and pacifist message of Nanak was gradually transformed without being abandoned completely. On the one hand Hindu ritualistic practices were gradually revived; on the other, the Sikhs came into armed conflict with the Mughals, who considered them rebellious and tried to suppress, if not exterminate, them. The sixth guru, Hargobind, proclaimed himself the spiritual and temporal leader of the Sikhs. Distinguishing between the two functions, subordinating the temporal to the religious, he yet insisted on combining them both in his own person.

Finally, the tenth guru, Gobind (1666–1708), took up arms against Aurangzeb and presented the two-edged sword as the symbol of the deity to his followers. More than any of his nine predecessors, Gobind brought the Sikh faith closer to Hinduism philosophically; but he also highlighted the distance between the followers of the two faiths through an emphasis on behavioral differences. Obviously influenced by the Bhagavad Gita, he presented himself as the protector of dharma; also he composed a hymn in praise of the Hindu goddess Chandi, whom he worshipped. He translated the Bhagavata Purana and some other Sanskrit texts into the vernacular. At the same time he instituted a ritual of initiation and a code of conduct for his followers. The latter included the injunction to remain unshorn (unlike the Hindus) and uncircumcised (unlike the Muslims). Besides their head and facial hair, the Sikhs were to wear other visible markers of their distinctive identity. He put an end to the institution of personal gurus and declared the Sikh holy book, the Granth Sahab, originally compiled by the fifth guru and containing the hymns of Nanak and many Sants and Sufis, as the eternal spiritual guru. Temporal power would vest in the Sikh congregation itself.

Theologically, the Sikh faith is syncretistic. Sociologically, the Sikh community is a reproduction of Hindu society, being characterized by caste distinctions to this day. Politically, it has remained opposed to the Muslims since the seventeenth century and began to distance itself from the Hindus towards the end of the nineteenth century. Those Sikh "Sants" of today who are politicians or who patronize terrorists in the name of the unity of religion and politics have hardly any claims to membership in the Sant tradition of which Nanak was a flower.

Religious syncretism bore witness to the vitality of the religious life in medieval India. But religion was to become perverted in the modern age. The coming together of religious traditions was to give way to the falling apart of politicized religious communities. The encounter of Hinduism and Christianity in the sixteenth and following centuries was to generate one last syncretic movement before the final parting of ways—or what seems so just now—between the adherents of different faiths in India.

Bengal, which had seen the coming together of Buddhism, Hinduism, and tribal religions, and later of Hinduism and Islam, and which had also witnessed an upsurge of Vaishnava bhakti, was to be the home of an experiment in Unitarianism in the nineteenth century. Its moving force was Rammohan Roy (1772–1833), a Hindu of wide sympathies and vast scholarship. He operated on two fronts. Convinced of the need for the elevation of the religious life of the Hindus in the direction of a syncretic theism, he launched a multipronged drive to synthesize whatever he considered most valuable in Vedantic Hinduism, Islam, and Protestant Christianity. He also initiated and supported campaigns to eradicate social abuses of various kinds in Hindu society. The most remarkable feature of his Unitarian quest was, perhaps, its rootedness in Hinduism, Roy's great admiration for the moral precepts of Jesus (on which he wrote a book) notwithstanding. His religious philosophy was perhaps too austere and intellectual for the Hindus to accept. Not surprisingly, therefore, the universal religion he dreamed of died with him. His successors split up and the majority returned to the Hindu fold before long.

COMMUNALISM AND SECULARISM

Rammohan Roy had hoped for a sociocultural and a religious renaissance under British rule (which he considered a civilizing force) and as a result of India's encounter with Christianity. The search for syncretism on the part of some was, however, more than matched by the fear of an imperial proselytizing religion on the part of others. The encounter of religious traditions was inevitably linked to the clash of imperialism with nationalism. Given the holist perspectives characteristic of India's cultural traditions, nationalism was presented as a religious quest. Thus, Aurobindo Ghose proclaimed: "nationalism is not a mere political programme; nationalism is a religion that has come from God."[19]

The dawn of the twentieth century saw political organizations draw upon religious symbolism to mobilize people in the struggle for independence. What is most significant is that the use of such symbolism was resorted to not only by exclusively Hindu or Muslim organizations but also by the multireligious Indian National Congress. This was no less true of the Congress under Mohandas Gandhi (1869–1948), the Mahatma, than it had been earlier when the reins of leadership were in the hands of militant leaders who projected a more emphatic Hindu personality. Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Gandhi presented new and divergent interpretations of the Bhagavad Gita that were reminiscent of old controversies but that unlike some of the commentaries, which had been renunciatory, argued a this-worldly philosophy of action.

Gandhi's approach to religious pluralism was transcendental rather than simply syncretic. Throughout his long political career he stressed the inseparability of religion and politics. But, he maintained, religion should not entail sectarianism: "This religion transcends Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, etc. It does not supersede them. It harmonizes them and gives them reality."[20] Gandhi genuinely respected all religions; his outlook on life was influenced not only by Hinduism, into which he was born, but also by Jainism, Christianity, and Islam. Convinced of the truth of all religions and of the limitations of human understanding, he considered conversion an expression of lack of genuine religious faith. He was horrified by the so-called religious conflicts: "Religion is outraged when an outrage is perpetrated in its name."[21]

Gandhi set himself three major goals: freedom from British rule, interreligious harmony, and the improvement of the socioreligious life of the Hindus. He sincerely believed that the goals entailed one another and were pragmatically related. Much to the dismay of secular-minded nationalists, he tied up the national movement after the First World War with Khilafat (the movement against termination of the caliphate) and later with the eradication of untouchability among the Hindus. He never waivered in his commitment to a holist worldview: each religion was all-comprehensive though there were many religions.

The Mahatma's efforts to unite Hindus and Muslims in the pursuit of the national goal of independence from foreign rule failed in the end. His conception of religion as faith wedded to moral reason was not shared by his followers, whether Hindus or non-Hindus. The religiosity which won against him was of the miracle-haunted rustic and the rootless urbanite on the one hand, and the profit-seeking politician on the other. Extremist elements among Hindus and Muslims alike repudiated his leadership: to the former he was a foe of Hinduism, to the latter of their aspiration for a separate homeland. Nationalism in India became polarized, with Hindus and Muslims generally pitted against each other. Although most Hindus stayed with the Congress, the two turbulent streams of communalism flowed along their separate courses, as the subcontinent lurched forward toward independence. Communalism in the sense of struggle for independence and power on the basis of religious identity rather than on the principle of territory—which is the usual basis of nationalism—thus came to dominate the internal politics of India.

Gandhi and like-minded people, especially the Muslim theologian and politician Maulana Abul Kalam Azad and the secularist Jawaharlal Nehru, could not stem the tide of communalism. India was partitioned in 1947 and the Islamic state of Pakistan was born in the midst of communal riots on an unprecedented scale, resulting in the killing of thousands of Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs in many parts of the subcontinent but most of all in the provinces of Bengal and the Punjab. Millions became refugees and fled across the newly created international frontiers. Gandhi's dream of a united independent India went up in smoke, but he did not have to suffer long: he was assassinated early in 1948 by a group of Hindu militants.

Instead of cleansing politics of its unsavory aspects, as men of faith such as Mahatma Gandhi had believed it would, religion was reduced to being a mere "sign of distinction" between politically mobilized human groups. It became a "shadow" of itself.[22] Millions of people felt revulsion toward the political abuse of religion, particularly by leaders who had no use for religion in their own lives. In such a situation, there were many who still believed in the idea of interreligious understanding, but there were numerous others who looked forward to the elimination of religion from public life. Jawaharlal Nehru (1889–1964) was one such rationalist and he committed independent India to the custody of a modern state. Secularism in India has, however, had far from an easy passage. Asked by André Malraux what his greatest difficulty had been since Independence, Nehru had replied, "Creating a just state by just means," and, after a pause, "Perhaps, too, creating a secular state in a religious country."[23] This was in 1958, eleven years after India had gained freedom.

Nehru was a modernizer who was deeply conscious of the harm that religiosity had done to India. He had written just three years before he became the prime minister of India in 1947 that it was "with the temper and approach of science allied to philosophy, and with reverence for all that lies beyond" that Indians must face life. He had further observed that "the day-to-day religion of the orthodox Hindu is more concerned with what to eat, who to eat with and from whom to keep away, than with spiritual values. . . . The Moslem . . .

has his own narrow codes and ceremonials, a routine which he vigorously follows, forgetting the lesson of brotherhood which his religion taught him."[24]

Nehru's views are important because they are the best possible statement of the liberal secular outlook, which is widely regarded as a precondition of modernization. In fact, what is remarkable is the need Nehru felt to defend religion as philosophy or as a concern with "all that lies beyond"; otherwise, he was an agnostic and favored a rationalist, and even a historicist, worldview.

An examination of Nehru's published work brings out clearly his conviction that religion is a hindrance to "the tendency to change and progress inherent in human society" and that "the belief in a supernatural agency which ordains everything has led to a certain irresponsibility on the social plane, and emotion and sentimentality have taken the place of reasoned thought and inquiry."[25] But, then, he did not worry too much about religion and its political expression as communalism because "the real thing" was "the economic factor."[26] He expected communalism to recede in the face of a reordered economic structure. But this proved a false hope, perhaps because no real economic restructuring was possible in the short run. Secularism as the basis of the state had therefore to be a policy of strict neutrality on the part of the state in its dealings with citizens irrespective of their various religious faiths. This policy is more a defensive policy to help tide over the intervening period until the ultimate transition to a truly secularized society than a positive philosophy of life.

It is pertinent to recall here that the emergence of secularism in Europe, in the sense of "disenchantment with the world" (as Schiller and Weber put it), was not only an expression of repugnance toward the corruption of institutionalized religion but was also aided by developments in the teachings of Christianity. The basis for the separation of state and church is to be found in the New Testament itself. The privatization of religion, through the assumption by the individual of the responsibility for his own salvation without the intervention of a church, was a later development. All this is well known. A similar ideology is, however, absent from the cultural traditions of India. The idiom in which to express the ideal of secularism has, therefore, yet to be constructed. This is not an easy task, because the great majority of the people of India are adherents of one religious faith or another and also because in such matters borrowed ideas do not carry us very far.

As for the vitality of the religious life of the people, it is unfortunate that what attracts attention most is the so-called fundamentalism among Muslims and Sikhs and revivalism among Hindus. There is no doubt that communal politics, which had been weakened considerably in the wake of Gandhi's martyrdom, has become strident again. Nonpolitical expressions of this vitality are also available, testifying to the capacity of the Hindu tradition to continuously spawn not only new cults and sects but also new gods and goddesses. The secularists consider this wholly regrettable because they see such developments as evidence of the persistence of antirational attitudes and social backwardness.

Obviously, their conceptions of rationalism and social advancement are unreasonably restrictive. They fail to realize that religiously minded people are not necessarily bad or stupid—certainly not more than the secularists themselves. It should be realized that secularism may not be restricted to rationalism as understood in the West, that it is compatible with faith, and that it need not be the sole motive force of a modern state. For the secularist minority to stigmatize the majority as superstitious and to preach secularism to them as the law of their being is both moral arrogance and political folly.

What, then, is the way out of the present predicament in the history of religion in India? The question is more easily posed than answered; but it is quite clear that the solution will have to be broadly humanist rather than narrowly sectarian or naively secularist. Maybe Gandhi's approach still has its uses. For Gandhi, religion was a matter of faith but not blind faith. He placed moral reason above scriptural authority. Religion, he maintained, is the source of absolute value and hence constitutive of social life; politics is the arena of public interest; without the former the latter becomes debased. But the multiplicity of religious faiths would generate conflict in the value domain itself. He considered the quest for a single religion neither feasible nor indeed desirable. There was thus no escape from a transcendentalist approach and the quest for interreligious understanding; a simple pluralism advocating respect for all religions would not do.

Gandhi's secularism was a restraint on the state, not because this was expedient but because society would ultimately be reformed by good people and not by governments. In saying so, he reiterated such old and enduring ideas as dharma, karma, and bhakti. He also sought to carry forward the syncretic tendencies that have always been present and that had become particularly salient in the medieval period. In doing all this, he also showed a keen awareness of the spirit of the age in which he lived, as, for instance, when he maintained that morality in our time finds expression through politics.

* * *

As an interpretive essay on religion in India, this has been an exercise in selection. The terrain to be covered is vast and bristles with many complex problems of fact and interpretation. To cut a way through it, I have focused on some points on high ground, as it were, in the hope that, seen together, they would provide a coherent picture. Doubtless there are other perspectives and other profiles. The issue is not that but rather that the interpretation offered here should be based on a fair reading of the history of religion in India. Naturally, I believe it to be fair. I certainly have my preferences in relation to the available interpretations, but they are not peculiarly mine. And, as the German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer has emphasized, "The very idea of a definitive interpretation seems to be intrinsically contradictory. Interpretation is always on the way."[27]

At this point it seems pertinent to state very briefly that I was born a Hindu and had a Hindu upbringing combined with a "modern" education—a common enough experience in contemporary India. I became an anthropologist, which means, I guess, that I have tried to look upon my cultural heritage with an attitude that stands in the twilight zone between sympathy and skepticism, admiration and distaste. But, then, there is really no minimum definition of what it requires and means to be a Hindu other than in terms of birth, and that gives me release. Although I do not believe in or do a hundred things that my grandfathers believed in or did, yet I do not feel I am not a Hindu; nor has anybody suggested otherwise. There are no practicing Hindus in the sense in which there are practicing Christians; there are no "five pillars" of Hinduism as there are of Islam. But my personal beliefs and behavior are beyond a certain point irrelevant to my concerns as an author. If I find that religion is constitutive of society in India, that does not mean that I wish it to be so. One does not wish that the Himalayas were or were not there; they *are* there.

What, then, distinguishes the perspective offered in this essay? It is above all the effort to look upon religion not as a reflection or a subsystem of society but as society itself, viewed primarily in terms of axiologically grounded social action, and as something on the move. Whether in its cosmological, moral, theological, or social aspects, the religious landscape in India has been characterized by pluralism for more than two thousand years. Holism and pluralism are not necessarily in conflict. Syncretic movements and interreligious antagonisms have been present throughout the history of India. If anybody should think that my emphasis on syncretism is misplaced, I would ask such a critic to ponder the Sant tradition. If India has ever had a religion that cut across traditional religious, social, and gender boundaries, that combined the intellectual and the emotional, that unified rather than divided people, it is the Sant tradition. It is up to us to realize the potential for good that is inherent in religion.

In the modern age, while conflict between politically mobilized religious communities has become a salient phenomenon in India, conscious efforts have been made to replace syncretism with secularism. Secularism is generally understood as both the limitation of the role of religion in human affairs and the policy of neutrality on the part of the state in relation to the followers of various religious traditions. Secularism would have been all right only if it had not been so utterly uncritical about its rejection of religion and its acceptance of science.

Meanwhile, the present is marked by the joyous return of religion to the secular city, as Harvey Cox has said,[28] and also by a resurgence of violence, even terrorism, in the name of religion. The secularists, whether liberals or Marxists, seem unable to appreciate that the processes of secularization themselves have contributed to the present impasse. The prospect is uncertain. The history of mankind, however, teaches us that, as Emile Durkheim observed, there is something eternal about religion as the moral foundation of social life. I stand with those who dare to hope that in India, and indeed everywhere else in the postmodern age, religion may yet be rediscovered as humanism. In the words of T. S. Eliot,

> The only hope, or else despair
> Lies in the choice of pyre or pyre—
> To be redeemed from fire by fire.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

In writing an essay like this, one draws on many years of reading and reflection. The understanding one comes to acquire is of course one's own, but many others are implicated in it. To try to provide a source for every bit of information and support for every opinion expressed here would be both tedious and pedantic. I will therefore confine myself to making a few additions to the references in the endnotes.

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Authority and Identity in India

T. G. Vaidyanathan

The Indian who acts according to love and duty could be said to personify the ideal of the guru-shishya (master-devotee) relationship. Like the mythical hero Rama, who embraces immortality, forgiveness, and reconciliation, the modern Indian can strive for an identity involving integration and hope and a balance between turning inward and turning outward. This relationship is a paradigm of all human relationships in India and offers the insight needed for reaching such psychic integration in today's difficult world.

O, my shoes are Japanese
These trousers English, if you please
On my head a red Russian cap
But my heart's Indian for all that.
—Song from the film *Shri 420*

In *A Passage to India*, E. M. Forster resorts to irony in portraying the pathetic efforts of his English characters "to disentangle the hundred Indias that passed each other in its streets." The great English novelist was writing in the twilight of the Raj, when Independence seemed

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such a distant possibility that one could talk of "a hundred Indias." Paradoxically, today, more than forty years after Independence, an Indian writing on the same subject may find himself trying to disentangle not just a hundred but a thousand Indias that seem to have taken to the streets. Still, he has to settle on something, some master paradigm that runs like a *leitmotif* through India's checkered history. It is my belief that such a dominant principle is to be found in the *guru-shishya* relationship, which links not only Krishna and Arjuna on the troubled battlefield of Kurukshetra pictured in the Bhagavad Gita centuries ago but also Gandhiji and Nehru in yet another chapter of her history that has not quite concluded.

The principle goes beyond caste and creed—the favorite halt of many an Orientalist trying to lay bare the heart of India—and is certainly not confined to Hindus, although Hinduism is the chief religion practiced in India. In the main this principle consists of choosing a unique other whose guidance is thereafter unquestioned and indispensable. You might say—if one is thinking of a parallel with the Western world—that the guru-shishya relationship occupies the same position in India that romantic love (with a capital L) has occupied in Western civilization at least since the twelfth century. India's dominant principle celebrates the abrogation if not the very extinction of personality, whereas the Western concept of romantic love joyfully celebrates the extension of personality and often personality itself.

That this principle infuses all of India's practices—secular and religious, artistic and philosophic, trivial and fantastical, private and political—is the chief point of this essay. When the harmony and symmetry of this relationship is broken—as it increasingly is in modern India—the guru-shishya conglomerate splits off into its component parts, precipitating the crisis of authority and identity that is rampant in India today. Let me illustrate with a few examples.

Jayendra Saraswathi is the fifty-six-year-old spiritual head of the Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt near Madras, which has a very large following within the Smartha Brahmin community of southern India. The current president of India, R. Venkataraman, is among his ardent followers. The mutt's lineage goes back to the ninth century A. D., when the first of the Shankaracharyas established several major spiritual centers in various parts of India to counter the growing influence of Buddhism. On August 23, 1987, the pontiff mysteriously disappeared in the early hours, and it was quite some time before his whereabouts became known. He returned, more or less of his own accord, to his spiritual headquarters a fortnight later. I say more or less, advisedly, because in the nature of things in India, people do not act solely of their own accord—even much venerated spiritual leaders. They owe allegiance to someone above them in a spiritual ascent upwards—or heavenwards, if you like—which does not quite reach God. For contrary to popular and widespread notions, *God* is not an invariable term of reference in human affairs in India. It is the opinion of the person above you that counts. Even intimate friends in southern India—the region I come from—address each other affectionately as "guru" (preceptor) or, in its more raffish modern form, as "boss."

Although Jayendra Saraswathi was the official pontiff for well over thirty years (he took over from his guru, Chandrasekhara Saraswathi, in 1956), he could not ignore the implorings of the ninety-three-year-old spiritual patriarch to return to Kanchipuram and resume spiritual duties. Less than two months after Jayendra Saraswathi's unsuccessful escape bid, yet another junior swamiji of the well-known Pejawar Mutt in Udipi, South India, abdicated in protest against a smear campaign mounted against him for his six-month tour of the United States. In the native perception, going abroad is still taboo for many pious Hindus, and not many Indians are aware of how till recently it has resulted in virtual excommunication from the fold unless expiated for by elaborate *prayaschit* (purificatory) ceremonies. In this case, however, the senior pontiff of the mutt did not attempt to dissuade his adventurous junior and appeared willing enough to accept his abdication. Was it an instance of Hindu tolerance of dissent, or was it because the junior swamiji had erred in the wrong direction by crossing the seas? A few weeks later, the junior swamiji was, in his turn, willing to return to the fold, provided no expiatory ceremonies were forced on him.

Interestingly and significantly, the more austere of India's spiritual heads have never left their native shores, despite the requests of their Indian and foreign disciples abroad. It is almost unthinkable for the senior Shankaracharyas of India to leave, and even the contemporary Sai Baba, who has a formidable following both here and abroad, has not yet ventured forth. The recent examples of Rajneesh and of J. Krishnamurthy, earlier, show how marginal they are to the spiritual mainstream and, indeed, their appeal in India has been confined to the deracinated Westernized elites. Of course, the great exception here is Swami Vivekananda, but he is not among the orthodox *acharyas* (or spiritual teachers) of India and certainly, the influence of Christianity on the various Ramakrishna missions that Vivekananda established is too well known to need any reiteration here. So the move of the South Indian monks Jayendra Saraswathi and Vishwa Vijaya Thirtha from their customary orbits poses entirely different problems. It is in grappling with these problems that we come to the vexing relationship between authority and identity in modern India.

Freedom for the archetypal Indian has never been merely freedom from the thralldom of some malevolent tyrant but freedom from the empire of the senses. John Stuart Mill's magnificent treatise on liberty may have fired the hearts of India's heroes of the freedom struggle, such as Gandhiji, Nehru, and Patel (most of whom were barristers of law educated in England), but it would, without a doubt, sound strange and perhaps even frightening to most Indian ears. The Western notion of freedom stems from a doctrine of natural rights that is grounded in the sovereignty of the individual, who in turn derives it from the unquestioned sovereignty of God. But India does not have a sovereign god. It has gods whose wills are not sovereign but subject to the adjudication of other wills, and the outcome is always a trade-off of the conflicting wills of various divinities. Hence, the Western doctrine of human rights is profoundly alien to the Indian, who pursues not rights but "adjustments" (which is the key to the Indian moral cosmos) that will lead to social harmony. It is not surprising that for many Indians insecurity is nearly always a consequence of the withdrawal of external authority but never of its presence.

As a consequence of this native disposition, the Indian is seldom, if ever, completely alone but surrounds himself with congenial others—his immediate family usually or, when this is unavailable, a cluster of friends with whom his relationships are invariably familial. He is, then, not so much an "individual" in the accepted Western sense of the term with its attendant corollaries of "identity," "selfhood," "moral choice," "growth," and so on but extraordinarily "dividual" (*pace* McKim Marriott, who has argued that the Hindu, for instance, "composed" as he is of "exogenous elements," cannot be thought of as having a bounded or an enduring ego in the customary Western sense[1]). Living as he does in a cosmos of interpersonal flow, the Hindu has an essentially fluid self, changing and interchanging with others in a manner that has baffled the Occidental mind habituated to the architecture of loneliness.

The radical and innovative Indian psychotherapist Surya (who has finally renounced psychotherapy for the spiritual solace of the Aurobindo ashram at Pondicherry) has drawn attention to this deliquescent Indian self and has praised Gandhiji for understanding "the positive cues and codes" of Indian culture, which led to the "massive motivational dynamics" of the freedom movement. A person's "dividuality" is in turn subject to the limitations imposed by relationship. An Indian thinks of himself as being a father, a son, a nephew, a pupil, and these are the only "identities" he ever has. An identity outside these relationships is almost inconceivable to him. It is very common in Indian households to hear a person referred to as "Rekha's mother" or as "Babu's father," and the people concerned don't feel diminished in the least by these self-abnegating nomenclatures. It is within the overall framework or network of these relationships that people situate themselves.

This is why all the neomodernist talk of two- and three-bedroom flats in India sounds a bit false. The emphasis on bedrooms highlights the sexual relationship between married partners, but this relationship has never had primacy in India, where children still sleep with their parents till almost their middle teens. The larger family unit, rather than nuclear conjugality, occupies center stage in India and still holds the master key to the diaphanous Indian self.

The missing self—nearly impossible for the Western psychologist to understand—has proved an almost insurmountable hurdle in ethnographic studies of Indian culture. It crops up in the notorious difficulties of translating native categories of thought into English, especially when the English compound carries the prefix *self*. Webster has listed four hundred fifteen *self* referents denoting several existential states and personal actions, running into some three pages. It would be a mistake to assume that there are exact equivalents for these *self* compounds in all the languages of India. Further, while there is a distinction in English and other European languages between the self-as-subject and the self-as-object, this distinction doesn't exist in India. Even in the category of self-as-object, the

Westerner further distinguishes between self-as-object-to-others and self-as-object-to-oneself, whereas for the Indian, the self is constituted only as object to others.

The self is not available as an object to itself in India, and so introspection as a psychological project doesn't exist. Self-knowledge, in the traditional Indian lore, is not knowledge of the empirical self but of the real self, which is Brahman. As the famous aphorism of the *Chandogya Upanishad* (one of the oldest canonical texts of India) has it, *Tat tvam asi* ("That art thou," in Radhakrishnan and Moore's translation). The Indian self, by definition, lacks reflexive awareness of itself. In a remarkable paper on "Indian identity," Milton Singer uses the semiotics of Charles Sanders Peirce to argue that there is no introspective knowledge of the Indian self, which is known only through inference and observation of its interaction and conversation with others.

To talk of self-actualization, self-consciousness, self-correction, self-definition, self-mastery, and self-knowledge, as so many writers on India do, is simply to bark up an alien tree. For example, *svadharma*—one of the key concepts in the Bhagavad Gita—cannot simply be rendered as "self-norm," the translation of several Indologists, because there is no self to speak of in the first place. Ananda Coomaraswamy, one of the ablest spokesmen for Indian culture, translated svadharma as "own morality" or "own norm" and thus avoided the pitfalls of using the *self* prefix.

As Agehananda Bharati, the Viennese-born maverick Hindu swamiji, has pointed out, the prefix *sva* is a personal pronoun that does not entail a *self* sememe. Even the Indian Independence movement—led by an English-educated elite—chose the word *swaraj* as a synonym for political freedom or sovereignty. "Swaraj is my birthright," Tilak, the fiery nineteenth-century Hindu nationalist, proclaimed in a famous speech while piloting the flagship of the freedom movement. The *sva*, as we have just seen, is a lexeme that cannot denote a self: *swaraj,* as in *svadharma,* can only indicate "proper rule," which is a very different thing from either of the customary English translations—"self-rule" or the bizarre "home rule." Svadharma is one of the fundamental concepts of India. A famous verse in the Gita has Lord Krishna emphasizing the importance of svadharma over *paradharma* (the duties of others) to the vacillating Arjuna.

Indian identity is never the sovereign identity of Western man (which, as we have seen, is guaranteed by a sovereign divinity) but is derived endogamously from others belonging to the same clan, tribe, or caste. It is an other-directed identity (but in a sense very different from David Riesman's). Identity formation in India is not something that occurs within the individual after passing through inexorable stages, as is the case in the West, but something that is bestowed on the person from outside. The orthodox Brahmin boy at the time of his initiation by his guru is endowed with an identity that is as far removed from the turbulence of adolescence in the Western sense as it is possible to be. When asked to identify himself, he is instructed to specify his *gotra* (seer's lineage), his particular Veda, his remembered agnatic ancestor, and whose grandson and son he is before giving his own name. Such a procedure would be unthinkable for a Westerner. Self-representation for the Hindu is usually in social terms ("I am so and so's son, daughter, nephew," etc.), never in personal or occupational terms, as it is for the Westerner.

This lack of a personal, intimate, Western self is why the most influential philosophical doctrine of India is the monistic *advaita*, which has affinities to the philosophic system of F. H. Bradley. Even Buddhism, which sets itself against advaita, denies the ontological reality of the self. The self as a homogeneous, independent entity capable of moral choice, discrimination, and reflexiveness is a Judeo-Christian conception wholly inapplicable to Indian psycho-social reality.

Here in India, the self can only be a transactional self "whose code is cognitive and whose transactions are conative."[2] The Indian is therefore strangely metaphysical and physical at the same time. I suppose we could say that the Indian can commit suicide only in the English language because in Sanskrit and in the North Indian vernaculars the term is *atma-hatya*, which means "killing the atman" (the fundamental, innermost self). In Indian thought, this is impossible, because the atman is indestructible by definition, and useless, since rebirth reintroduces all the problems evaded by suicide.

If there is no intrinsic self, then the Socratic injunction to "know thyself" becomes meaningless. The Indian is knowable or known, not to himself, but to others: his teachers, his friends, his elders. In other words he is an ensemble of representations and a vector of social relationships. This conception has serious consequences for the moral realm. With its concept of the individual, authentic self (except in instances of serious mental disorder like schizophrenia), the West can distinguish between the self and its actions, as Robert Browning does in "Rabbi Ben Ezra": "Thoughts that cannot be packed/ Into a narrow act/ Fancies that escaped .... " But this distinction is impossible in India, where moral judgments are remorselessly behavioristic. You do not say of a person in India that he is "friendly" or "well behaved" *in vacuo*. Instead you say that he "comes home frequently," which translates *friendly* into behavioral terms, and that he "always shows respect to elders," which indicates that he is well behaved. Some Indian definitions put the moral person at the base of a pyramid of relationships, at the apex of which is the divine. But even this model is misleading. The Indian is not a creature of rigid hierarchy. Across *varnas* (the four basic castes) and encompassing them, severally and individually, there is the kindliness and conscientiousness of the relationship between master and devotee, between guru and shishya (or *chela*, to use a non-Brahminical expression).

Just how much the conception of the guru governs Indian behavior is best illustrated in India's most loved epic, the Ramayana. At the beginning of the epic we see Rama, on the eve of his coronation, go into exile for fourteen years in deference to the wishes of his infatuated father. The ideal of submission to elders is so strong in India that Rama's resolution remains unshaken against the imploring of his own mother, Kausalya, the popular will of the city of Ayodhya, and the indignant rage of his brother Lakshmana. It is not as if Rama were wholly blind to the nature of the action he has been asked to perform. On the first night of his exile he remarks to Lakshmana: "For what man O Lakshmana, what father, what fool, would abandon a son like me, obedient to his wishes, for the sake of a woman?" It would be facile to talk here of a craven and unthinking obedience to authority and run in search of modern explanations by such behavior. The respect for public opinion that Rama displays in wishing to discard Sita after the defeat of Ravana and her rescue for him has troubled even the most ardent admirers of the epic. One of our most eminent philosophers, the late Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, a former president of India, has castigated Rama's behavior and described him as a "blundering amateur in love." But the truth is that love, being solely an affair between two people, is in India always subject to the larger demands of *dharma* (duty) and respect for elders.

Thus Sita, although passionately loved by Rama, is in the course of the epic devalued by Rama in favor of Lakshmana, the populace of the kingdom of Ayodhya, and even the heroic vulture Jatayu (which dies while trying to prevent Sita's abduction) because Jatayu is expressly linked in Rama's mind with his father Dasaratha.

Romantic love of the kind that made Edward VIII abdicate from the British throne because of his love for Mrs. Simpson would be wholly incomprehensible in India. Not *Antony and Cleopatra* or even *Hamlet* but possibly *King Lear*, with its theme of ungrateful children, would yield a clue to India's psyche, although even there, Cordelia, with her unbending notions of honesty and truthfulness, would be found repugnant and, worse, disobedient by the millions of Indians now watching the Ramayana in television dosages every Sunday morning. During the finals of the world series on cricket in India—the Reliance Cup—enthusiastic fans in Calcutta urged on Australia's opening batsman, David Boon, with cries of "Bali, Bali" to vanquish Australia's traditional foe, England. This must have flummoxed the Australian batsman, but Calcuttans were merely referring to the episode in the Ramayana where the monkey king Sugriva fights his brother Bali. Some social analysts have remarked on the resemblance between the Rama of the TV serial and the Indian prime minister Rajiv Gandhi and have suggested that the characters in the serial may have been modeled on the charismatic political leaders in India today. The producer of the serial, Ramanand Sagar, has remarked: "Maybe V. P. Singh [Rajiv's chief political rival] is modeling himself after Ravana or Rajiv after Rama."

Meanwhile, controversy surrounds the republication by the government of Maharashtra of B. R. Ambedkar's *Riddles in Hinduism* (written in 1954), with its controversial appendix dealing with the lives and loves of Rama and Krishna. Now Ambedkar is the patron saint of the "untouchables" of India and one of the chief architects of India's "secular" constitution. Several episodes of the great national epic have ignited his wrath. One is the episode in the *Yuddhakanda* when, doubting Sita's chastity, Rama tells her that she is free to leave him for anyone else, and then in the *Uttarakanda* when he has his pregnant wife abandoned in the middle of the forest by Lakshmana, again because of renewed rumors about her suspect chastity. And then there is the episode of Rama's treatment of Sambuka, the Shudra (lowest in the four-tier caste hierarchy), whom he summarily beheads because the Shudra had the temerity to meditate and do penance (both prerogatives of the twice-born castes), thus causing the death of a Brahmin boy.

India being India, these episodes written in an epic several centuries back are not treated as belonging to a hoary, near-mythical past. Instead, they provide a battleground for the clash of current interests between eternally warring factions. Both militant right-wing groups in Bombay and their real enemies in India—the Dalit groups—are up in arms against each other, the former demanding the banning of the Ambedkar book and the latter its publication. So the Ramayana is still very hot property in India, and the TV serial has boosted the sale of books based on the epic and even the expounding of the Hindu faith. The Ramayana will continue not only to inspire the lives of millions of Indians but also to shed light on the more opaque aspects of the Indian psyche. Some clever exegetist will no doubt be able to explain away the waywardness of Rama to his wife, and the poet Valmiki himself is ready with an explanation for his behavior to Sambuka.

The Ramayana's hold on the Indian imagination continues unabated despite the passage of time. While Homer and Plato are texts for study in Western universities, their heroes are far removed from the life of the man in the street in Lower Manhattan or Leicester Square. But in India, the film star or the jet-setting politician or the man in Dharavi (Bombay's most terrifying slum) are alike joined in their adoration of the epics (both of which, Sri Aurobindo—India's most admired philosopher-sage of the twentieth century—declared to be greater than Homer's epics and the "whole dramatic world of Shakespeare"). Gandhiji himself was one of the Ramayana's ardent votaries, although he preferred the silkier and more etiolated later version by Tulsidas to the sage Valmiki's more robust original. Versions of the epics have appeared in all of India's major languages, and they are still the indispensable guides to India—despite the Naipauls and the Arthur Koestlers.

What makes Rama—not Krishna—the culture hero of India is his willingness to place duty and dharma above mere sexuality and to sacrifice his beloved wife at the altar of abstract principles. He is, in addition to being God incarnate (Rama is an *avatar* of Lord Vishnu), the pristine embodiment of the ascetic ideal, which has a long and distinguished lineage in Indian culture.

Of course with the passage of time and new stirrings—possibly triggered into existence by the New Cinema and the New Literature—there has been some erosion of the ideals laid down in the Ramayana. More Indians than ever before probably feel the conflict between the pull of the master principle—embodied in respect for the guru—and the pull of other new ideals, such as the principle of equality between the sexes and the ideals enshrined in the preamble to the Constitution of India. But, if we are to go by the evidence that the practice of modern psychotherapy in India offers, it looks as if little has changed fundamentally and the reign of the guru principle is still supreme.

Some Western analysts are prone to look at the the guru-shishya relationship psychoanalytically and to see it as an example of masochism or as evidence of an unhealthy Oedipus complex. But these explanations look strained and all efforts to capture the elusive Indian identity within a Western framework have foundered. To take a representative example, R. P. Goldman, in two lengthy and painstaking analyses of the two great epics of India—the Ramayana and the Mahabharata—has sought valiantly to bring the heroes of the epics under the province of the Oedipus complex: "If one is to search for testimony of oedipal conflict in the Ramayana," he writes in an extensive essay on the great epic, "one is confronted with an *embarras de richesses*. Indeed, the epic presents a most complicated oedipal situation. To put it briefly, there are too many fathers, too many mothers and too many sons."

Yes, indeed! But in India fathers take precedence over mothers and sons in ways not dreamt of in the house that Freud built. The Freudian mania is so deep that it invades even the animal kingdom of the epics and we have papers with such bizarre titles as "Fratricide among the Monkeys: Psychoanalytical Observations on an Episode in the Valmiki Ramayana." The legend of Ganesa, India's celebrated elephant god—Lord of Obstacles and Lord of Beginnings, invoked and propitiated before every auspicious event in India—has been the subject of much speculation among Western scholars about whether he is not after all India's sole and decisive contribution to the universal status of the Freudian Oedipus. The episode in which the infant Ganesa, asked by his mother, Parvathi, to guard the entrance to her bathroom, is beheaded by his enraged father, Lord Shiva, would seem to cry out for "party-line Freudian analysis," in the striking terms of Wendy O'Flaherty, anthropologist and historian of religions. And that is precisely what the episode has attracted from Western scholars in pursuit of the elusive Indian Oedipus. So the substitution of an animal's head for Ganesa's encourages our psychoanalytical friends, who now see Ganesa's trunk as an inverted, limp phallus. What the ordinary Hindu, untroubled by oedipal requirements, sees in the Ganesa myth is, needless to say, one more illustration of the Indian need to submit to authority or, in Indian terms, to a guru figure: in the myth, to the father.

Conflict is not the structural principle of Indian culture. Probably for that reason tragedy as a literary genre is absent here. Our writers celebrate not the brooding Hamlets or the tormented Oedipuses but integrated figures like Rama and Krishna, for whom wisdom lies in the banishing of doubt. It is not in the least a Cartesian culture. Kalidasa's *Shakuntalam*, the archetypal Indian play, in its tranquil serenity, is far more akin to Shakespeare's final plays. Not ripeness but forgiveness and reconciliation is all. Not death but immortality is the governing principle of the culture so beautifully illustrated in the Ganesa myth of the *Skanda Purana*.

It may be seriously doubted whether the whole notion of the Oedipus complex has any relevance at all to an understanding of the Indian identity. A. K. Ramanujan (see "Telling Tales" in this issue) has suggested in an interesting paper that where the Indian Oedipus differs from his Western counterpart is in the "direction of aggression or desire." But does aggression play the same role in Indian identity formation as it does in the drama of the Oedipal crisis? Girindasekhar Bose, founder of the Indian Psychoanalytic Society and one of the pioneers of modern psychotherapy in India, himself disagreed with Freud on this issue. And, more recently, J. S. Neki observed in his presidential address to the Indian Psychiatric Society that "it should not be surprising to find the Oedipus complex present in a culture where affectional strivings are frustrated almost as a rule. However, in a culture where such strivings are duly nurtured, one is not likely to come across this complex except among cultural freaks."

There has been a clever attempt to get round the difficulties posed by the development of the Oedipus complex in the Indian setting by talking, as Sudhir Kakar, a practicing Eriksonian, has done, of the son's "oedipal alliance" with the father in his struggle against an overwhelming mother and her femininity. But in dealing with things

Indian it is wrong to put the accent on struggle in the first place, whether it is against the father or the mother. This comes from treating the libido as unidimensional and ignoring the affectional component.

Kakar has suggested similarities between Tantric yoga and psychoanalysis but is himself repelled by Tantric androgyny with its attendant dissolution of gender identity—the cornerstone of Western psychoanalysis. But it is this primal androgyny (Lord Shiva as *ardhanarishwara*—half-man, half-woman—being the supreme exemplar) that is at the gateway to the nonsexual, open Hindu personality. The individual's continual receptivity to the other results in even personal identity being derived interpersonally. This is worlds removed from the embattled self so graphically described by Sartre in *Being and Nothingness.*

The ethical prerogatives of such a watery, fluid self are bound to be vastly different from the basically self-preserving imperatives of the Western self. In a culture supporting and nurturing such a changing self, it follows that sacrifice and altruism are not pathological—or masochistic in the psychoanalytic sense—but the true expressions of the human spirit. The Gandhian *satyagraha*, for instance—which even the great psychologist Erik Erikson subsumed under the rubric of masochism—was only the first great expression in modern India of age-old Indian ideals. And the whole apparatus of fasting and purification that he employed to protest against *adharma* is again a throwback to the hoary Indian practice of *tapas* (fasting and meditation), which has been with us from time immemorial. It is only the contexts and domains of application that have changed and altered beyond recognition.

Gandhiji himself can be regarded as the latest in the line of gurus stretching from Vasistha, Viswamitra, Krishna, Buddha, Shankaracharya, Ramanuja, Madhwa, Basava to Gandhiji's great forebears (both secular and religious) in the nineteenth century. But it is necessary to understand the whole notion of guru to forestall objections of a cultural, social, psychological, or political kind. At a superficial level, this notion appears to violate the principle of equality between human beings, a violation that modern Indians might find repugnant. For them, the image of the guru is of someone sitting on high doling out wisdom to his shishyas, or chelas, who sit at his feet.

The sacred texts of India, including the Upanisads (*upa-ni-sad* meaning literally sit-near-down) would themselves seem to lend credence to the view that the disciple meekly sought enlightenment from the guru. Of course, nothing could be further from the truth. The guru-chela relationship isn't in the least repressive or authoritarian. It is the chela who chooses his guru and not the other way round. It is not just a goal-oriented, short-term relationship like, say, the doctor-patient relationship in modern psychotherapy.

The ultimate Indian goal is spiritual independence followed by dependability—not the genital personality Freud described or the fully autonomous individual. The relationship between the guru and his shishya is a far more personal and intimate relationship (as Indian relationships go) than modern psychoanalysis presents. In the West the patient abreacts via the therapist (on whom he has "projected" through the mechanism of transference) and relives all past conflicts as territorialized through the Oedipus complex. It is this which leads to the insight that alone can free him. This is consonant with the Western belief in self-knowledge (the cornerstone of therapy, which goes back to the Socratic dictum about the unexamined life not being worth living) and a psychic need to go back to the past to guide the present. Not just the pastness of the past but its presence (in the words of T. S. Eliot) is the psychic fulcrum of psychoanalysis.

But, in India, there is no reliving of past conflicts, and daily life here is replete with injunctions to let bygones be bygones. In the guru-shishya relationship the process of banishing the shadows of the past is carried to its furthest possible extreme. As J. S. Neki, one of the doyens of modern psychotherapy in India, has observed, "In the guru-chela relationship there is a symbolic castration of earlier relationships—a rebirth with the forging of a new relationship in which the guru comes to establish not a proxied kinship with the disciple but a relation *sui generis* stronger in a way even than the relation between a disciple and his parent."

The Hindu culture is in more ways than one a cremating, not a burying, culture. If you merely bury the past, it can always later be exhumed: Freud's dreaded "Return of the Repressed." But if you cremate a body or a memory, well, it is lost forever. That is probably why in India the past is not readily available in the form of chronological history, biography, or autobiography. India may live *in* the past in more ways than one, but she does not live *with* the past.

Preservation of the past in the form of old historic monuments is not one of India's great strengths. It was left, ironically, to the most imperious of viceroys—Lord Curzon—to restore India's most famous monument, the Taj Mahal, and to found the Indian Archaeological Society. The only visible past Indians venerate is sacred monuments in the form of temples and mosques. Otherwise, the past is visually, at any rate, entirely obliterated. This situation accounts for the modern look of several towns, which can be very up-to-the-minute and state-of-the-art, but once again, this is camouflage. The old Indian self, with its respect for gurus, lurks underneath, leading a somewhat subterranean but, we may be sure, contented life. Perhaps India, with her doctrine of *karma* and belief in rebirth, has to be rid of the immediate and tangible past to give room to the real past: the past of previous lives.

The guru-chela or -shishya relationship is the paradigm of *all* relationships in India. It includes the relationship of a devotee to his creator (as exemplified in the magnificent musical compositions of Saint Thyagaraja in praise of Lord Rama), of a servant to a master (the monkey god Hanuman's relationships to his Lord), of friend to friend, of parents to children, of lover to beloved (Krishna and Radha), and—the final irony and uniqueness of the Indian situation—even of enemies to each other.

As I write these lines, the part of India where I was born is convulsed in grief because of the death of the chief minister of Tamil Nadu, M. G. Ramachandran. M.G.R., as he was known popularly, came to power in 1977, maturing under the protective halo of an earlier Tamil political guru, C. N. Annadurai, who, in turn, was the shishya of E. V. Ramaswamy Naicker (E.V.R.). That E.V.R. was the apostle of a militant brand of atheism did not prevent him from being worshipped or deified in accordance with the dictates of the guru principle. Indeed, statues of him dot the crowded thoroughfares of the state. And so do those of Annadurai ("Anna," elder brother to his countless followers), E.V.R.'s spiritual heir and M.G.R.'s guru. Millions of admirers called M.G.R. *vadhyar* (teacher, mentor) and *thalaivar* (chief). E.V.R. was known as *periyar* (much respected teacher) among his followers. And, although Richard Attenborough, mindful of Western values, titled his film just *Gandhi*, no one in India dares refer to Gandhi without the honorific *Mahatma* in front or, at least, the respectful suffix *-ji*.

Few spheres are exempt from the influence of the guru principle, including games. Patrons of cricket know the colossal influence that the famous Ranjitsinhji, Prince of Nawanagar, wielded on his nephew Prince Duleepsinhji. Never did a shishya perform more heroically under the watchful eye of a guru than did Duleep at Lord's in 1930 when he hit an unforgettable century for England against Australia's might. Traditional sports like wrestling are wholly under the sway of the guru principle, and everyone in India knows that track queen P. T. Usha's career burgeoned under the watchful eye of her guru, Nambiar.

The guru principle is dominant in the traditional arts (dance and music preeminently). No icon of India is better known than that of Lord Nataraja (the presiding deity in the temple at Chidambaram) in his "dance of Shiva" pose. Literature is an ancient affair in India but only as drama or poetry. The novel is a late arrival, and the strain shows. In English, R. K. Narayan is its most well-known and, arguably, its ablest practitioner. But he has no gurus to speak of, unless you count Graham Greene, who launched Narayan into international publication by recommending his first novel, *Swami and Friends*, to Hamish Hamilton. But just how much the guru principle can potentially operate even in contemporary literature can be gauged by the fact that Mulk Raj Anand, one of the pioneers in the field alongside Narayan and a Bloomsbury Marxist to boot, took the first draft of his first novel, *Untouchable*, to Gandhiji at Sabarmati Ashram. Anand's desire for the guru's approval of the manuscript was such that Anand raised money for his passage to India through donations and took the first available boat to Bombay.

The cinema is a more dicey medium in India: at once both popular and modern. The conventional, routine all-India film, as Farrukh Dhondy has pointed out in an earlier issue of *Dædalus*, is a celebration of the Indian self, not as it is, but as it is enjoined to be by nationalism, religion, and folk tradition.[3]

However, if the argument of this essay has been sound, there is no Indian self per se without the necessary "enjoining" by a host of others. It is the popular Indian cinema—whether it is in Hindi or in any of the other major Indian languages—that displays the full panoply of the deliquescent Indian self. The song quoted at the beginning of this essay from the popular Raj Kapoor film *Shri 420* (1955) parades the features of this many-layered self in a manner that makes a mockery of simplistic labels such as schizophrenia, which Western observers like Koestler et al. are wont to bring up against what they regard as the "divided self" of the Indian. Divided, yes, but not just into halves (which would justify the charge of schizophrenia, therapeutically, or that of hypocrisy, morally) but into multiple, autonomous, self-subsistent identities. Hence the quite extraordinary romance plotting of our popular films (rather like the plays of Shakespeare's final period) with the whole apparatus of lost children, wicked uncles, bizarre coincidences, and happy endings in which warring families reunite, enabling lovers to live happily ever after.

Raj Kapoor's *Awaara* (1951) with its Chaplin-inspired central figure, had it all, and its title song "Awaara Hoon" (literally "I am a tramp") was on everyone's lips. Not surprisingly, it was universally popular, its prints reportedly having been flown to far-flung outposts of the Soviet Union—including two to Soviet expeditions near the North Pole! Kapoor's death last year certainly brings to an end an important chapter in the history of Indian cinema. Derek Malcolm, former director of the London Film Festival and a noted critic of *The Guardian*, was led to remark that while Satyajit Ray made films *about* the poor, Kapoor made films *for* them. And certainly the later Ray, with his excessively Western control of emotion, does not come anywhere near the Indian condition even in his much-admired *Charulata* (1964). Only the early films, notably *Pather Panchali* (1955), *Aparajito* (1956), and the opening passages of *Apur Sansar* (1959), seem to belong with the best of Indian cinema.

The international prestige of the cinema that Ray pioneered has certainly tended to obscure the importance of the commercial cinema for an understanding of Indian culture and society. The art cinema was so busy discovering India visually (Nehru, too, was discovering India in his books, but this was spiritually and emotionally) that it did not convey the feel of the real India. The commercial cinema undoubtedly conveyed a "felt" India and seemed relatively unconcerned with the question of visual realism. It is a cinema where some of the ethical values that stress the surrender of the personality to a higher principle are paramount. The art cinema seems finally to have reached a cul-de-sac with Adoor Gopalakrishnan's *Anantaram* (1987)—a hopelessly pale and belated echo of Alain Resnais's *Je t'aime, Je t'aime* (1968). The wheel has eventually come full circle, and the recent international success of Mira Nair's *Salaam Bombay*

(1988) seems to signal a return to common sense without a wholesale abandonment of "art." When a Westernized, alienated Indian in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* gives a list of his favorite movies (all European masterpieces, predictably), another character—belonging to the new postmodern breed—exclaims, "You've been brainwashed," and proceeds to give his own list, which includes *Mother India, Mr. India, Shri 420*, but nothing from Ray, Mrinal, Aravindan, or Ghatak. Recently, Pico Iyer, in his vastly amusing *Video Night in Katmandu* (1988), has used the popular Hindi film as itself an extended metaphor for India.

Increasingly over the years the link between politics and the popular cinema has grown stronger. It is significant that several Bombay film stars (Amitabh Bachchan, Sunil Dutt, Vyjyanthimala) have entered politics and become members of Parliament in New Delhi. Southern Indian politics is even more film dominated. Two of the leading actors became chief ministers of their respective states, and some of the younger ones have now entered the fray. Political elections in the south have come to resemble nothing so much as a vast epic made on an ambiguous script with the electorate itself directing the show. And in this odd medley of film and politics, it is the guru-shishya paradigm that reigns supreme as yesterday's film stars become today's political gurus.

In modern India, where in the aftermath of political independence there has been a great deal of psychological disorientation, especially in the four major metropolitan centers, the guru-shishya relationship has received fresh impetus. A new kind of disorientation can be discerned among the affluent "urban alienates," to quote yet again from Agehananda Bharati, whose sense of cultural identity, which is the only identity the Indian has, has been jarred. Uprooted from native moorings, Indians have, since the 1950s, flocked to cities—frequently far from their religious centers—in astronomical numbers. This change has exacted a price. It has created an unprecedented existential dilemma that most Indians can deal with only by taking recourse to suprapersonal figures that serve as modern gurus.

The difference between the modern guru and the traditional guru represented by Jayendra Saraswathi (the missing monk with whom this essay began) is crucial. The traditional guru may be at the very center of relationships that the Indian weaves around him like a spider to entrench himself in the outer world, but it was always the whole network of relationships, not any particular segment of it, that defined the "dividual" Indian. The modern guru, on the other hand, is called upon to be a surrogate other in a sea of anonymity, and he is clearly expected to bolster a wounded, weakened identity.

The constituency of the modern guru—of whom the perfect modern exemplar is Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi in Andhra Pradesh—is transregional, paranational, and universal. Unlike the traditional guru, the modern guru is not restrictively orthodox or ritualistic. Whereas the older Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram scorned modern methods of locomotion, preferring to walk during the permitted months, Sai Baba has been known to soar above his devotees in a helicopter. A Tantric in his skills, he has attracted eminent educationists and even sportsmen like India's cricket star Sunil Gavaskar. Sai Baba's forte is miracles: he is said to have made Swiss watches and holy ash materialize for the benefit of his adoring devotees.

Miracles are looked at with suspicion by the orthodox constituency, whose cultural ideals are still those of asceticism and otherworldliness. Whereas modern gurus—with their bizarre eclecticism (Sai Baba, for instance, claims to be an avatar of God, although in the Saivite tradition, to which he belongs, there cannot be any avatars)—reconcile a basically religious traditionalism with a surprising this-worldly modernity. Little wonder if the devotees of Sai Baba and Ramana Maharishi in the south and of the Radhasoami faith up north are found among the English-speaking elites (except for those predominantly Anglo-Indian in sensibility). Some film stars of the flamboyant life-style sought the sanctuary of the Krishnamurthys—both the famous J. K. and his mimic, the lesser known U. G. K. The high priestess of Indian culture and chief architect of the numerous Festivals of India abroad, Pupal Jayakar, is herself a votary of J. K.

All this is not to suggest that contemporary India is wholly governed by the guru-shishya paradigm at every level of thought and sensibility. There is a sizable elite that is predominantly Anglo-Indian in sensibility—brilliantly caricatured by V. S. Naipaul in *An Area of Darkness*—which despises anything remotely Indian with the shining exception of the *ayah*, or servant class, inexplicably unobtainable abroad. And then there is the Americanized elite which is mostly found in the ritzy advertising sector busy plagiarizing David Ogilvie and Co. without that master's acumen. Both these elites are hostile to the guru principle. To them, it is feudal and antiquated. Perhaps, after all, these armchair Marxists are true Indians: to swear by the sage of socialism or, latterly, by Habermas, Michel Foucault, or Derrida is to be Indian with a vengeance.

In fact, viewed in this broad perspective, to be Indian means to respect written authority—sacred or secular—all the way down the line. For without the support lent by authority, the Indian runs the risk of forgetting who he is. Let me briefly illustrate this idea with the help of a much acclaimed Kannada novel, *Samskara*, by U. R. Ananthamurthy. The central problem of the novel springs from the sudden loss of a guiding authority due to a momentary sexual aberration on the part of the protagonist—Pranesacharya—a devout, much-esteemed Madhwa Brahmin priest. It was Erik Erikson who first drew attention to the identity problem that it raises. The thematic core of the novel concerns the priest, who falls into a ritualistic dilemma involving the cremation rites of a fellow Brahmin who has abandoned the rigid straits of orthodoxy for the primrose path of dalliance. In the course of action, Pranesacharya loses the status of his caste by sleeping with the low-caste Chandri and begins to drift. Tremendous authority is vested in this exemplary Brahmin ("the Crest Jewel of the Vedanta" is how he is initially described). He is born a "man of goodness" but loses his hereditary authority.

He falls into a state that the novelist describes by alluding to the legend of Trishanku. Now Trishanku was a king who sought to reach heaven but found himself impeded by Indra, Lord of Heaven, with the result that the king found himself suspended between two worlds. He has, in Hindu mythology, come to symbolize people in a like state. Another analogy provided by the novelist is equally suggestive: "Like a baby monkey losing hold of his grip on the mother's body as she leaps from branch to branch, he felt he had lost hold and fallen from the rites and actions he had clutched till now." The way of the monkey is the Way of Works as opposed to the kitten's, which is the Way of Faith in Vaishnavite theology. *Samskara* ends, significantly on a note of anxious optimism: "Pranesacharya waited, anxious, expectant."

Pranesacharya's plight is that of many modern Hindus in search of a stable identity in a shifting world. It is this type of what I shall call fallen Hindu who is ripe for a modern guru. Their number in India is steadily growing. The novelist U. R. Ananthamurthy, himself part of modern India, has confessed that he got the idea for writing *Samskara* after a viewing of Bergman's disturbing religious masterpiece, *The Seventh Seal.*

V. S. Naipaul, in a now celebrated attack on *Samskara* in his *India: A Wounded Civilization*, doesn't dispute that the theme of the novel is "a Brahmin's loss of identity," a "sudden neurotic uncertainty about his nature." But, for him, Indian culture's limitations spring from the fact that the protagonist of the novel, the Acharya (the guru) is not allowed "to work out his faith and decide where he stands." He editorializes: "Because men are not what they make themselves, there is no question here of faith or conviction or ideals or the perfectability of the self. There is only a wish for knowledge of the self, which alone would make possible a return to the Hindu bliss of the instinctive life: 'to be, just to be.' "

Naipaul dramatically contrasts the Acharya with Gandhiji, who, roused by the Hindu-Muslim massacres in riot-torn Naokhali in 1947, was heard to exclaim: "*Kya Karun? Kya Karun*? What should I do?" Finding the Mahatma at this "terrible moment" "magnificent," Naipaul draws up a devastating indictment of the Acharya and the culture he represents:

> The Acharya will never know this anguish of frustration. Embracing the "demon world," deliberately living his newly discovered nature as he deliberately lived out the old, he will continue to be self-absorbed and his self-absorption will be as sterile as it had been when he was a man of goodness. No idea will come to him, as it came to Gandhi, of the imperfections of the world, of a world that may in some way be put right. The times are decadent the Acharya thinks . . . and the only answer is a greater righteousness, a further withdrawal into the self, a further turning away from the world, a striving after a more instinctive life, where the perception of reality is even weaker and the mind "just one awareness, one wonder."

These observations tend to obscure the deeper affinities between the Acharya and the Mahatma. If the Acharya consulted the holy books and prayed before the god Maruthi (one of the names of Hanuman, the monkey god of the Ramayana) for guidance in a dilemma, Gandhiji, too, undertook fasts to purify himself and the nation on, oh, so many occasions. Both the Acharya and Gandhiji looked for divine guidance for the solution of their problems. In this they are very much alike.

The gravamen of Naipaul's charge lies in his assertion that it is precisely because Pranesacharya can only "further withdraw into himself" that no "idea will come to him," as it did for Gandhiji, of the possibility of a better world. We should ponder the fact that two other observers, belonging to two entirely different cultures, have thought otherwise. T. N. Madan (author of "Religion in India," elsewhere in this issue) has observed that Pranesacharya's crisis may have only sharpened his sense of "the impossibility of retreat into himself." Erikson (commenting on the film version) has said of Pranesacharya at the end that "a number of yet undefined new cycles—of restitution and of transcendence—have been reopened."

Might this be because Indian identity has never been a solely personal affair, contingent on experience, as in the West? Perhaps Naipaul would never have passed these strictures on Pranesacharya if only he had cared to remember his own calamitous journey through India's areas of darkness, "collecting impurities," much as the Acharya did; perhaps he would have felt more compassionate toward the Acharya and the civilization that he represents. The truth is that the Acharya in Ananthamurthy's novel is not a man who seeks to better the world. This would be to misconceive him comprehensively. He is a man who seeks to overcome dualities and conflicts in quest of India's time-honored monistic goal of choiceless awareness. "O God, take from me the burden of decision" is the anguished cry of the Acharya in his hour of crisis. Naipaul correctly describes this state but rejects it in preference to the Western ideal of working out your faith and deciding where you stand. Given the nature of cultural determinism, the Acharya could no more have worked out his faith in the lonely eyrie of his self than Anselm or Augustine could have feely chosen the Madhwa faith to which the Acharya belongs. Naipaul expresses surprise that for a novel set in modern times "the age seems remote. . . . certainly Gandhi doesn't seem to have walked this way."

But novels inspired by Gandhian ideals have protagonist figures like the Acharya of *Samskara*, who show little inclination "to work out [their] faith and decide where [they] stand." The distinguished Indian novelist, Raja Rao, is a case in point. He certainly began as a Gandhian (for he, too, like Mulk Raf Anand, visited Gandhiji at Sewagram Ashram), and his *Kanthapura*, written in the late 1930s, is replete with Gandhian ideas. But by the 1960s the identity confusion of the modern Indian had reached alarming proportions. Raja Rao's

The Serpent and the Rope (1960)—arguably India's most metaphysical novel—shows the tormented protagonist, Ramaswamy, turn at the end of the novel toward the sanctuary of a guru. Initially we see him in France researching the possible Hindu origins of the Albigensian heresy. The novel begins with Ramaswamy proudly tracing his lineage to the ancient sage Yajnavalkhya, and the rest of this massive novel (some four hundred–odd closely printed pages in its Indian paperback edition) is a gradual peeling away of his acquired Western self, symbolized at the end by the breakup of his marriage with Madeleine, who has converted to Buddhism. He heads for Tranvancore in the southern tip of India to sit at the feet of his guru.

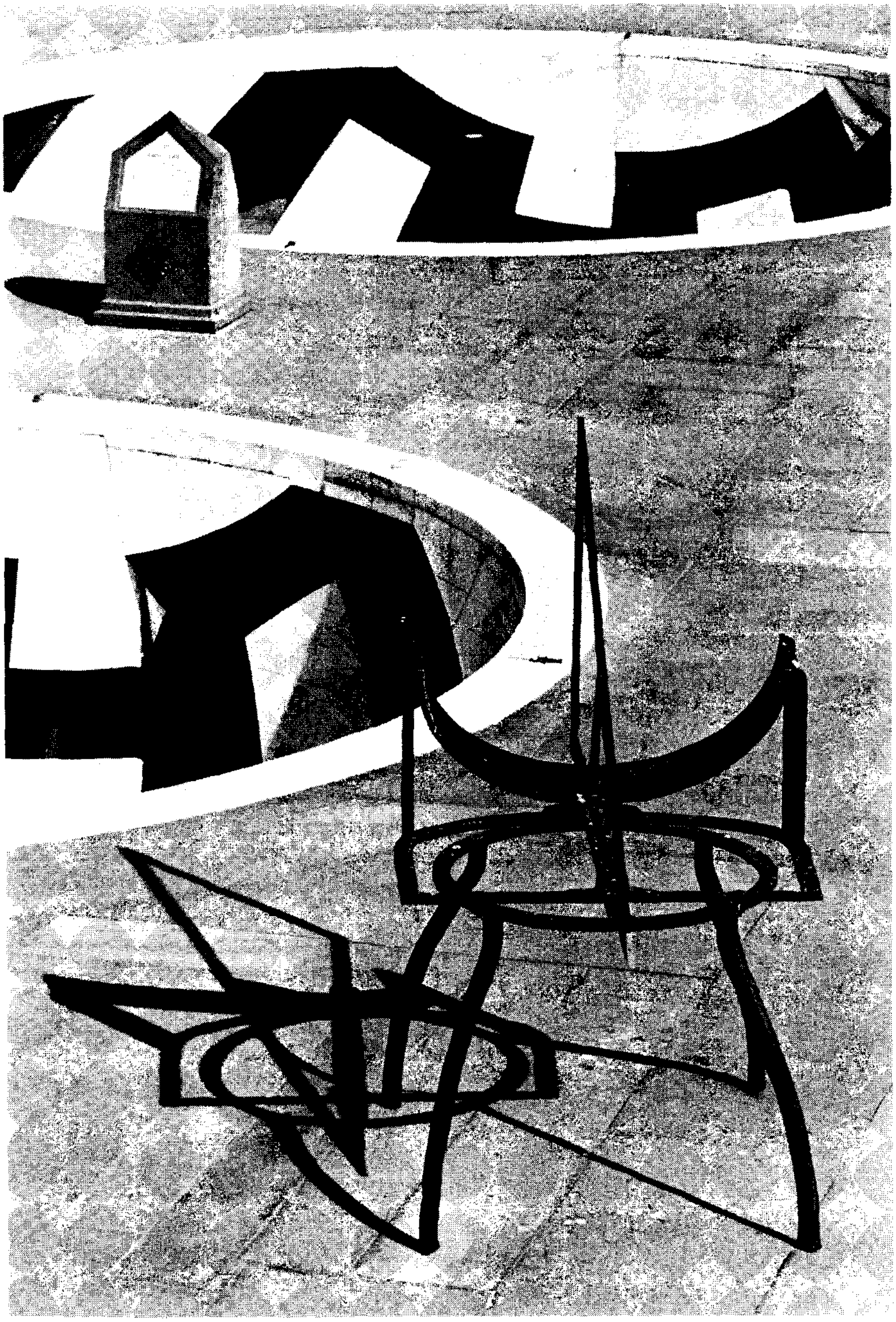
"No, not a God but a Guru is what I need. . . . Lord, Lord, my Guru, come to me, tell me; give me Thy touch, vouchsafe," Ramaswamy cries, much like the Acharya in *Samskara*: "the vision of Truth, Lord, my Lord." Increasingly, it seems, the disoriented modern Indian is—like Arjuna in the battlefield of Kurukshetra—in need of a guru. As India becomes more confused, it seems less in need of gods. It needs gurus.

ENDNOTES

[1] McKim Marriott, "Interpreting Indian Society: A Monistic Alternative to Dumont's Dualism," *Journal of Asian Studies* 36 (1) (November 1976): 189–95.

[2] I am heavily indebted to Agehananda Bharati for his stimulating paper "The Self in Hindu Thought and Action," in *Culture and Self: Asian and Western Perspectives*, ed. Anthony J. Marsella, George Devos, and Francis K. Hsu (London and New York: Pavistock Publications, 1985) for seminal insights. The quotation is rather cryptic, and I take it to mean that the Indian thinks and acts with different notions of the self. In other words, the "cognitive self and its orectic corollaries," as Bharati puts it, are radically disjunctive.

[3] Farrukh Dhondy, "Keeping Faith: Indian Film and Its World," *Dædalus* 114 (4) (Fall 1985):133.



Contemporary Indian Painting

Gieve Patel

Art can shock, and thereby inspire recognition and change. In India, a country constantly reckoning with generations of turbulence, the materiality of painting provides a second chance to see. Indian art informs and confronts Indian life without abandoning past tradition; recent collaboration between tribal artists and formally trained artists attests to the dialogue between preservation and change so integral to Indian painting. In the willingness to take up meaningful images from India's past, present, and future lies the painter's idealism. Isolation and fragmentation, elements of the country's history as well as its art, appear in paintings with representational images torn asunder as well as abstract lines of color in disarray. Difference, between artists such as Padamsee and Patel, Kapur and Khakhar, becomes connection.

A complete essay on contemporary Indian painting should undoubtedly cover the work of eighteen painters at the very least and should make reference to ten more. It should describe the activity in seven major centers in the country—Bombay, Delhi, Calcutta, Baroda, Madras, Hyderabad, and the state of Kerala. This essay will cover the work of only six painters, however, and I shall be one of them.

My justification for this restriction is that I wish to project the insider's view, the participant's. The cardinal sin of envy has played

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a role in my choices. At various times in my own growth as a painter, I have fiercely envied each of the five artists I shall speak of. That is why I've had such a good look at their work. Happily for me, gentler emotions took over at one stage, and ultimately I found their work a source of great joy, something to emulate, to function alongside of, and only very rarely to take heed of, hoping myself to skirt marshy areas that one or another of them may have temporarily fallen into.

I started in the early 1960s by trying to paint exactly like Akbar Padamsee. Fortunately for him, I did not succeed. Few things are more depressing to an artist than having a bad but successful imitator. I did drool over his works—how could I use red like that, endlessly burning and smoldering within itself? How paint a human body so that it seems almost not to be present and yet has the solidity and structure of a firm rock? To this day I have not fathomed the secrets of those works. I could at best imitate the manner of the brushstrokes or carefully place colors next to each other the way I thought he might. The result would almost always be fatuous.

Padamsee's reaction to my paintings, though, was encouraging. In 1962, what could his approval of those juvenile works have meant? His evaluation would have gone something like this: "It's good that the man is not painting village women at the well. Good too he is not 'interpreting Indian reality' by a set of clichéd rural or urban images that have been done to death and never had a true life about them anyway since Amrita Sher-Gil[1] died in 1941. He wants to paint the naked human body, and that is subject matter for anyone in any age. The work looks well intentioned. He may even get over the imitative mannerism of it. Though when he paints the figure, he does not take the space around it into account, does not see that the 'negative' area around the body has shape and substance, and is very much a part of the painting."

In this imagined speech ascribed to Padamsee I have encapsulated some of his concerns as a painter, and they persist with him today: no square centimeter of the canvas is less important than any other; the painting speaks from its entirety. Any isolated area must speak its own structure, just as in the context of the rest of the painting it is itself a structural part of the larger edifice. And the "subject matter" (placed in quotes because it is tricky, troublesome, and half-correct even to isolate it as such) must carry its own authentic poetry, which will have nothing to do with the imaging of well-worn commonplaces.

Attempting to distill this vision still further, I hazard the view that it is an aspiration for unity. It is one way of confronting fragmentation, personal and social, a malady most of us in today's world carry within us in varying degrees. There is another way of confronting this problem, and we shall examine it when we speak of other painters. In the meantime we see Akbar Padamsee making a daunting armory of means and bringing it into service for paintings that are simple in their immediate imagery but complex in their execution.

Padamsee works with diagrams, grids, color charts, mathematical structures; he digests Paul Klee's tome on painting—*The Thinking Eye,* a quietly revolutionary book demonstrating that poetry and philosophy inhere in grammar. He studies Sanskrit. The equivocal grammatical structures of that language, devoid of rigid punctuation, stimulate his own unorthodox reading of traditional verses; and this results in one whole set of paintings on the sun and the moon as the twin movers of time.

I sometimes nurse an irreverent thought: what kind of paintings would Padamsee produce, had he allowed himself to jettison some of this baggage early in his career? I do not have a view of artists as holy ignorants, spontaneous and uninstructed. Great artists are almost always greatly literate. Therefore, to me, Padamsee's extrapainterly concerns do speak of the high level of his personal culture. But I am now exploring the outer, slightly desperate edge of this culture. He has himself admitted that after setting up a schema on his canvas, obtained by much structural calculation, he has not infrequently contradicted it during the actual working out of the painting. I suspect that contradiction happens more frequently than he would admit. His "subject-matter" (quotes again) is the naked human body of no specific race, is nature as lakes, rivers, mountains of no specific geographic location and building structures that do not correspond to a particular city.

Such a choice has an asceticism about it, a stern turning away from the particularities that the eye would almost naturally pick up and the abstracting of them into a unified central essential, thereby denying the taste and flavor of locality. This asceticism is denied by a great elemental sensuality. Ultimately, this sensuality takes possession and triumphs over all the preparatory calculation. The lakes, rivers, mountains are depictions of primal water, earth, air, trembling and shimmering. The sun and the moon are the great fires. The human body is flesh, comprised of these elements. I have said this elsewhere, and it bears repeating: Padamsee is a materialist if you define matter as the few irreducible things our life is made of.

Would this vision subsist for Padamsee without the awesome machinery that defends it? The thought may be primarily an idle one, but I persist because there is something of importance to be understood here. I believe the machinery is needed because it gives this particular artist the go-ahead signal, the permission to work. It is as though after undergoing a hermetic penance, which he actually enjoys, he is set free to indulge himself. What is washed away by the self-imposed discipline is guilt, the guilt of unduly enjoying the act of painting! A price has been paid, and he may now freely do the thing that might earlier have carried a prohibition about it.

This prohibition haunts many artists in India, and each finds his own way to overcome it. What could be the source of the guilt? We shall have to eschew personal case history now and look for a common factor. I believe the guilt comes from a sense of pursuing a "useless" activity in a country where obviously more important things need to be attended to. The painter is idealistic enough to feel badly shaken by this premise. And yet the need to paint asserts itself against reason, common sense, and the choice of apparently more noble vocations.

Granting himself permission to paint is the first important and decisive victory the contemporary Indian painter wins for himself. As he progresses in his work, a world of allies, disciples, and opponents begins to form around him. Something of the kind happens with all artists, in all countries, but there is here perhaps a degree of earnestness that is exceptional. The fragile ground won by the first battle can be fortified only by the assent of other practitioners, augmenting the self-granted permission to paint. Suddenly, there are others too who are saying yes! And some who may be whispering no.

This is the genesis of the wars of belief waged through the 1950s and 1960s, and well into the 1970s. To newer painters in the country today my statement may appear overly dramatic. But I have been present at gatherings of artists where "formal values" have been opposed by "transcendence," and the evening has literally ended with screaming and tears. And all for the best. The relative ease of today's discussions is the result of those wild exchanges, the extraordinary churning up of artists, their beliefs, and their physical locations, so that contemporary Indian painting became one integrated national phenomenon despite the great diversity in the practice of it.

The integration is apparent in the genuine and avid interest Indian painters show in each other's works, bridging far-flung centers of painting in the subcontinent. A new painting completed in Baroda today will be discussed in Delhi within the week. And on more than one occasion the entire community of artists has put aside differences to act almost as an organized union on issues affecting the general good. Predictably, the Lalit Kala Akademi, the national patron body in New Delhi, comes in for punishment often—for lack of imagination, for some degree of corruption, and sometimes for a genuine helplessness before the scale of things in this country.

In 1968, Nissim Ezekiel,[2] poet and art critic, said to me: "Indian reality does not have to be village women at the well. If some have seen it so, does it invalidate a more real search for it?" The statement resulted in my taking a close look at newspaper photographs, and I discovered that most of them depicted statesmen being garlanded, feted, and applauded. The endlessly repeated unction of the ceremony impressed me a great deal and became subject matter for a set of paintings.

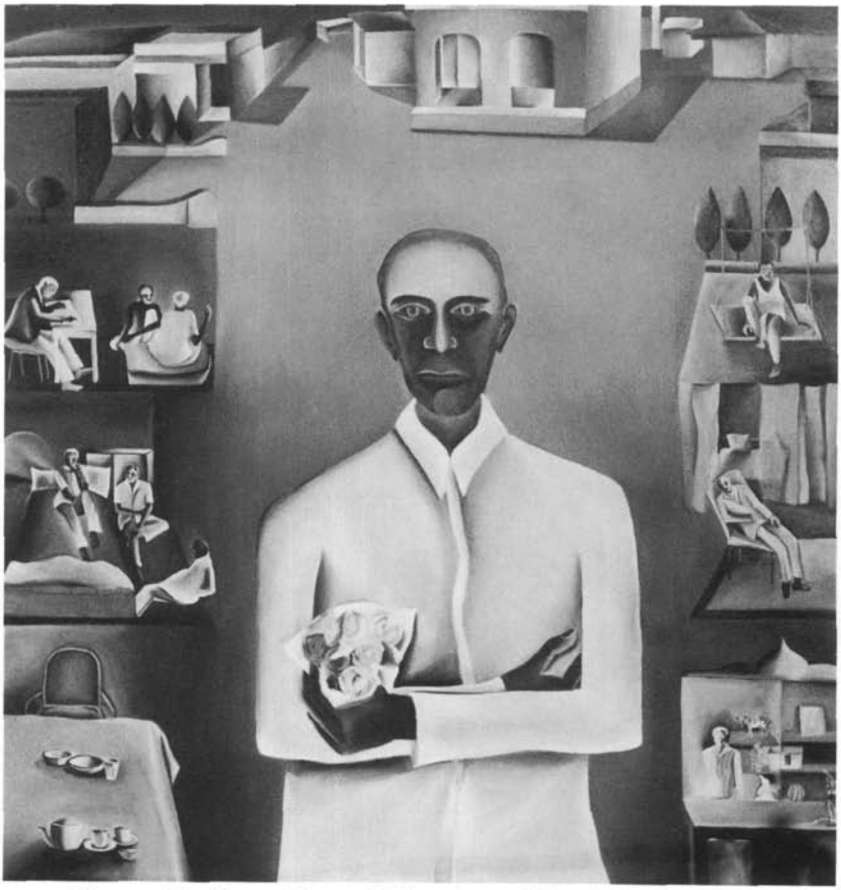
I took the photographs and translated them into paintings. If in the photograph the statesman looked pleased and reassured at being congratulated (and he often did), I wanted him pleased and reassured in the painting as well, without extra comment from myself, and without employing caricature. The paintings became a "double-see" through which the viewer quickly identifies the images with things he is used to seeing repeatedly in the papers. He also registers with a slight shock that this time they are presented to him as paintings, ostensibly works of art meant to lend dignity and grace to the occasion. And yet, while presenting them without an arch wink, weren't the dignity and grace actually being withheld? And something more lethal being hinted at, behind the ceremoniousness? It is in the double-take that some of the irony of the message is conveyed.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s Bhupen Khakhar, working in Baroda, systematically lifted images from shrines, middle-class interiors, popular posters, and salesmen's charts in bazaars. He created a whole new iconography for Indian painting. These works imply an attitude that differentiates Khakhar from an earlier generation of post-Independence painters—this artist was not going to be oh so serious about it all! The earlier painters saw themselves as rebel priests. Khakhar decided to take no shade of the clergy seriously. He voluntarily stepped down from high concerns of the art of painting and let the *middle* middle class into his work, the class of his own origin. He copied its decor and celebrated its members' listless lives. Willingly and happily, he identified with their bad taste—the garish color schemes in their homes, the gewgaws in showcases. But somewhere along the way the mischievous schoolboy quality of the work began to acquire unforeseen depths, something like compassion for this life he was describing. Drawn cheeks, dark hollows under the eyes contradicted the sumptuousness of the colors. We begin to see behind it all the desperate struggle to keep afloat that plagues low-income people in this country. Also, the spiritual dessication of urbanites puzzled by the increasing emptiness they encounter as traditional beliefs are slowly eroded.

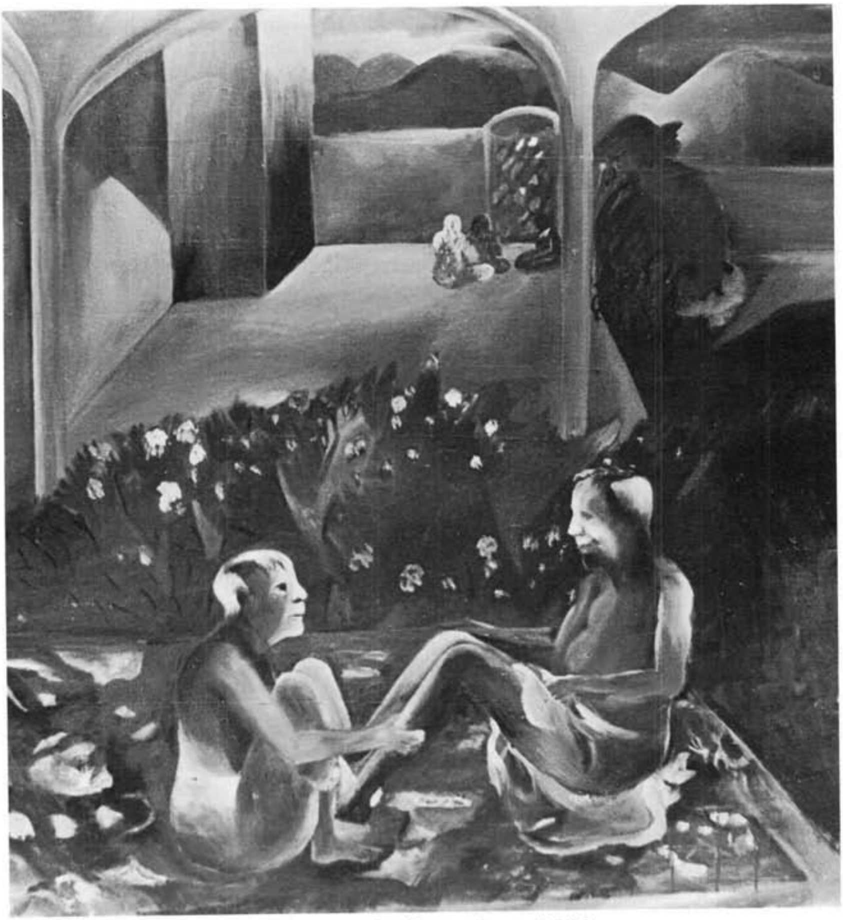
Remember Padamsee's response to fragmentation—his unified abstractions. After guilt and the prohibition to work, how to respond to fragmentation is the next most important hurdle the Indian painter faces. I must necessarily leave more specialized probing into etiology to experts in the field. To me it seems enough that the country is almost always at the brink of dismemberment. Whatever submerged predilection toward fragmentation the individual carries has no difficulty finding objective ratification outside—the continual pain of living in a society that seems all the time on the point of falling apart. That it ultimately does not fall apart is why the Indian painter of today has succeeded in creating a troubled, true, and rich image of his problematical time and country. He has used the potent tensions of this struggle to create his images.

Padamsee, I've said, heals himself by demanding unity. Khakhar does it by indulging multiplicity. The canvases thrive on an accumulation of disparate detail. The word for it is *additive*. Khakhar's structures of this period seem designed to take in as much as can come into the work and to accommodate it all lovingly.

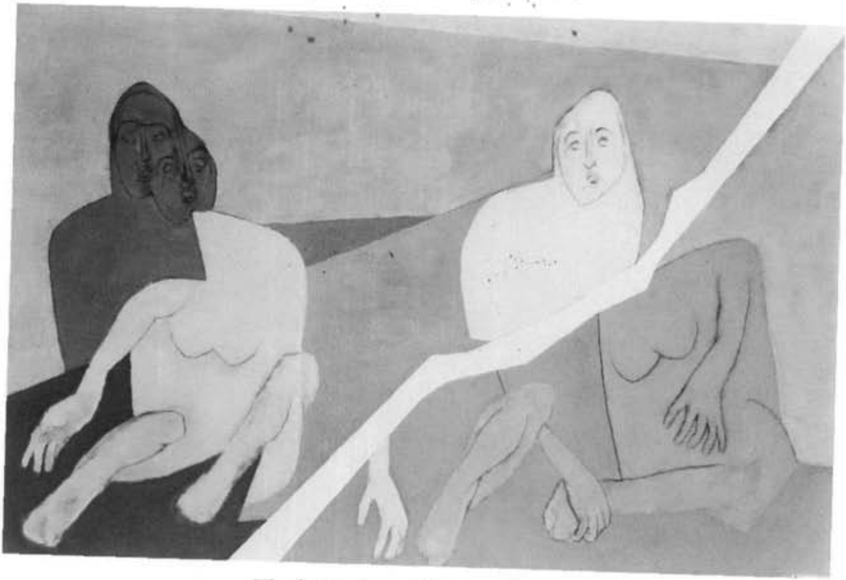
Khakhar's irreverence for the shrines of high artistry extends also to the way he works on his paintings. He is self-taught and has



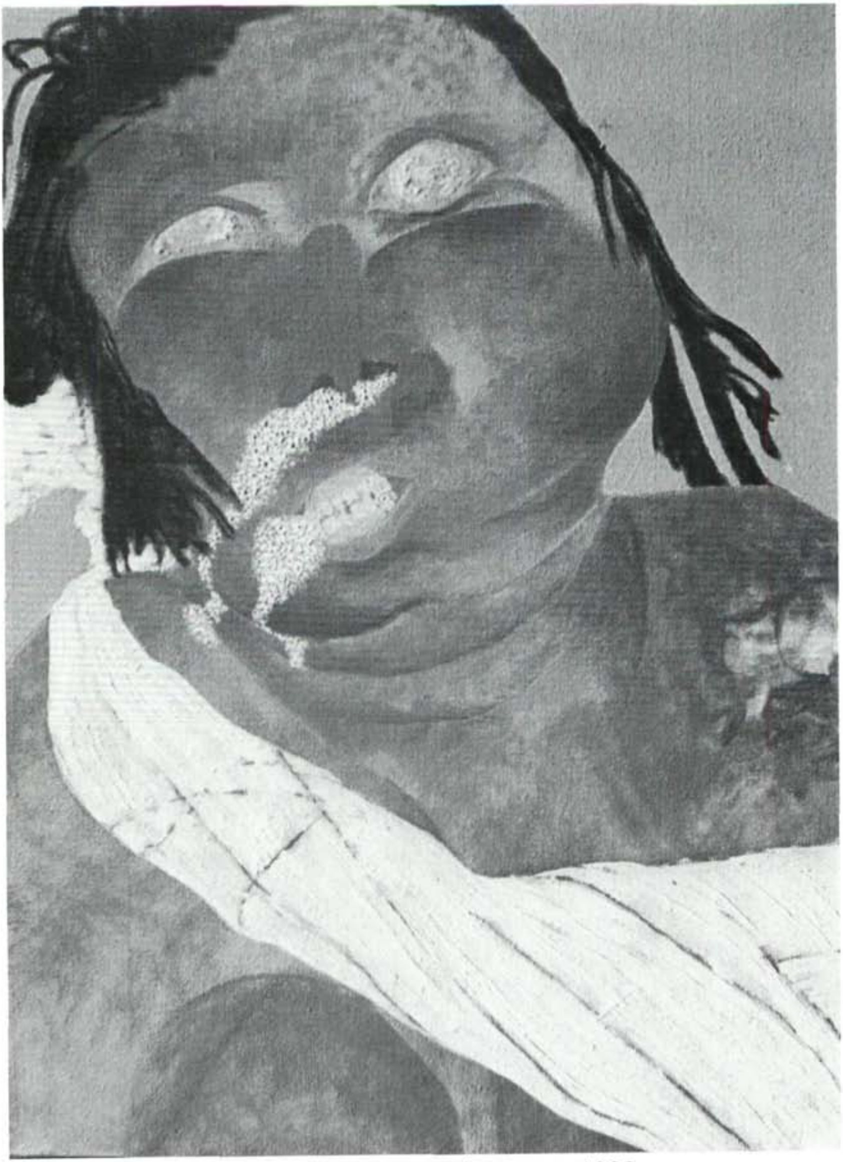
Bhupen Khakhar, *Man with Bouquet of Plastic Flowers,* 1975 (National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi)



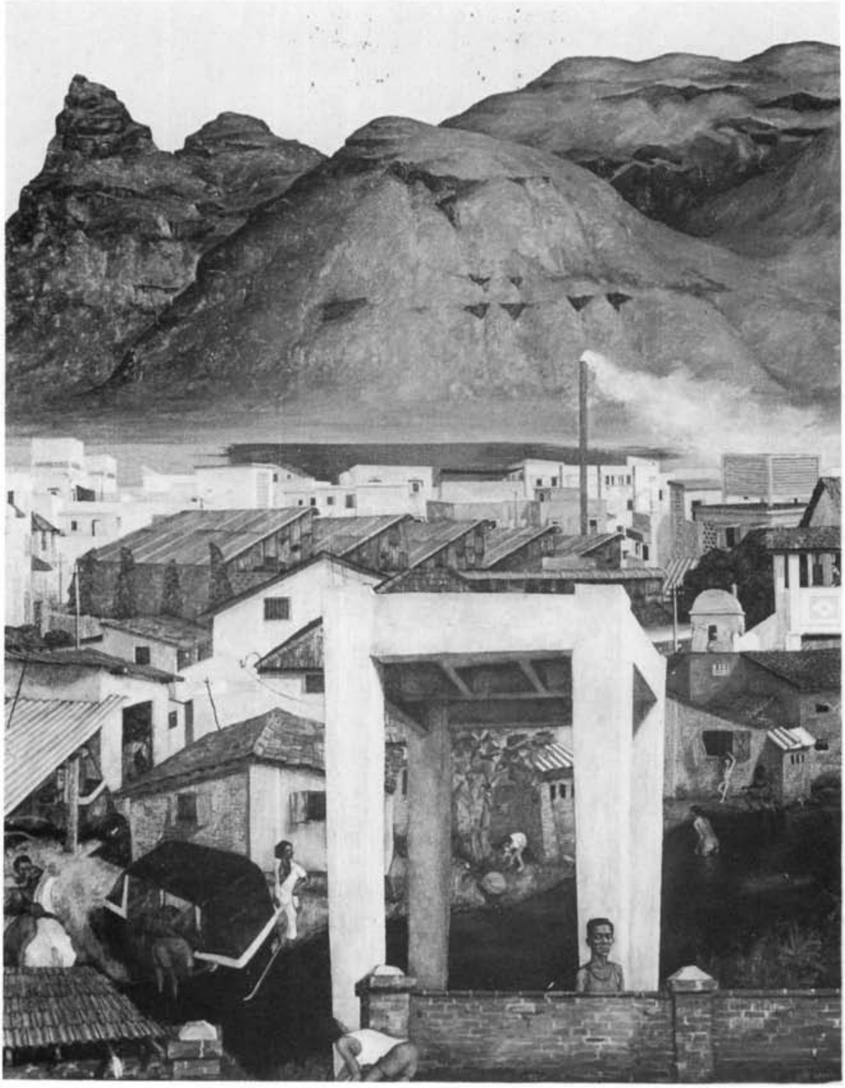
Bhupen Khakhar, *Seva*, 1987
(private collection)



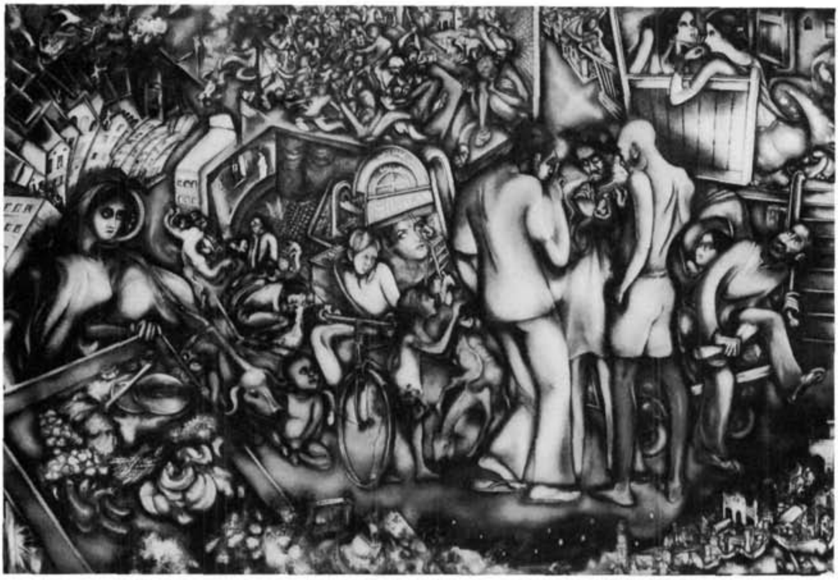
Tyeb Mehta, *Diagonal,* 1973
(Chester and Davida Herwitz Family Collection, Massachusetts)



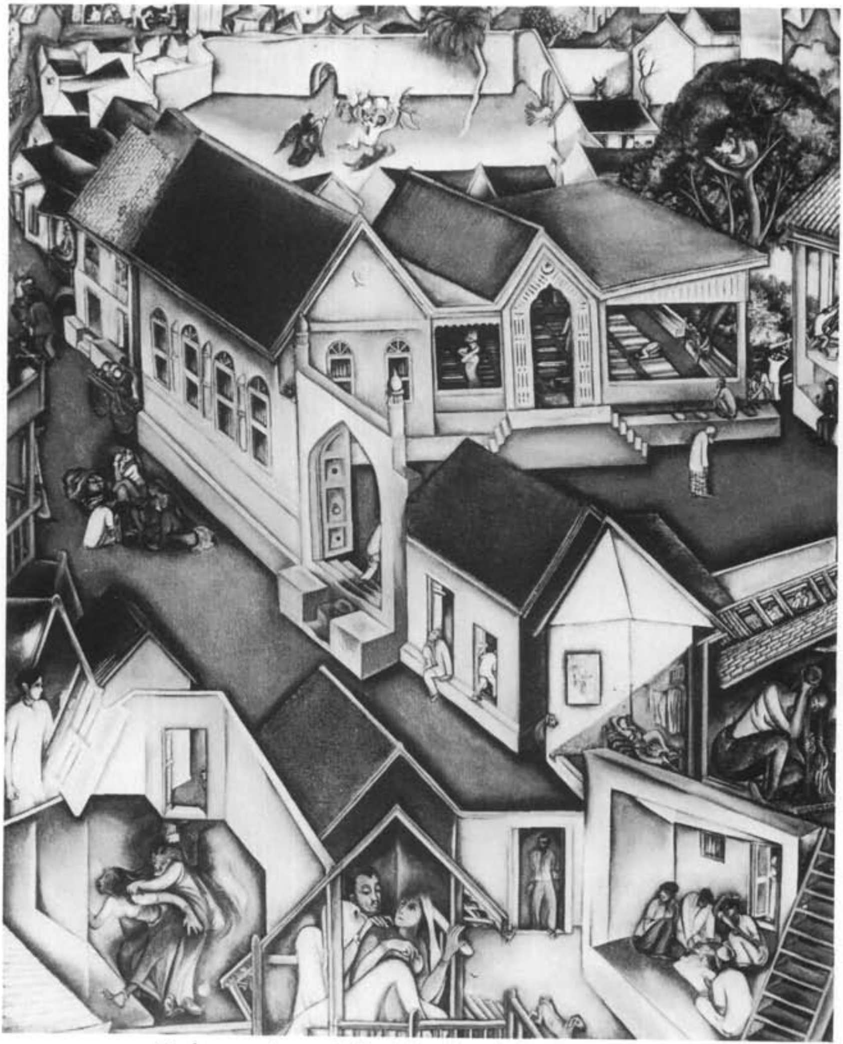
Gieve Patel, *Drowned Woman,* 1983
(Guy and Helen Barbier, Geneva)



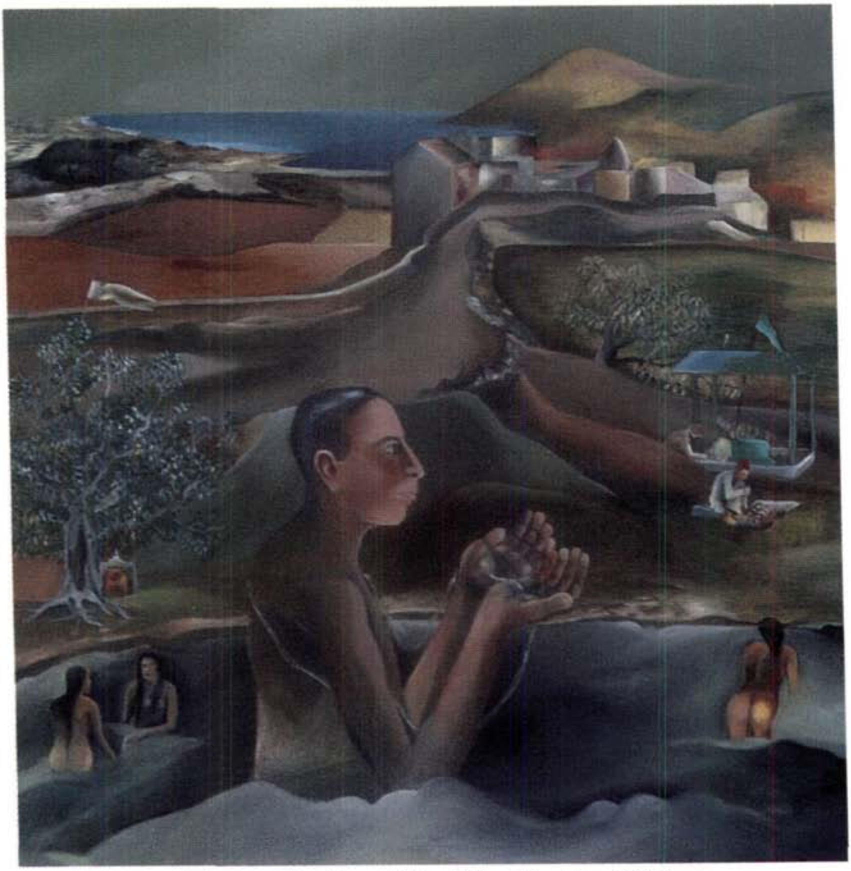
Sudhir Patwardhan, *Nullah*, 1985
(Proctor & Gamble India Ltd.)



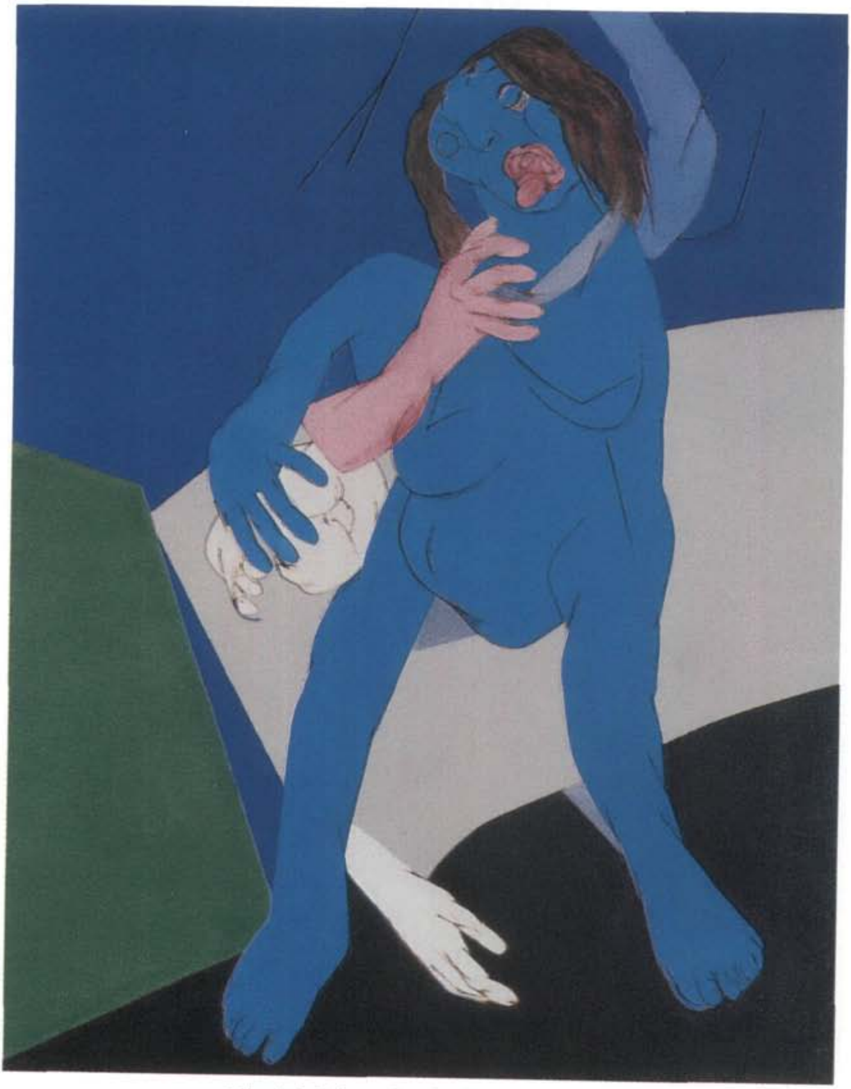
Gulammohamed Sheikh, *City for Sale,* 1981–1984
(Victoria and Albert Museum, London)



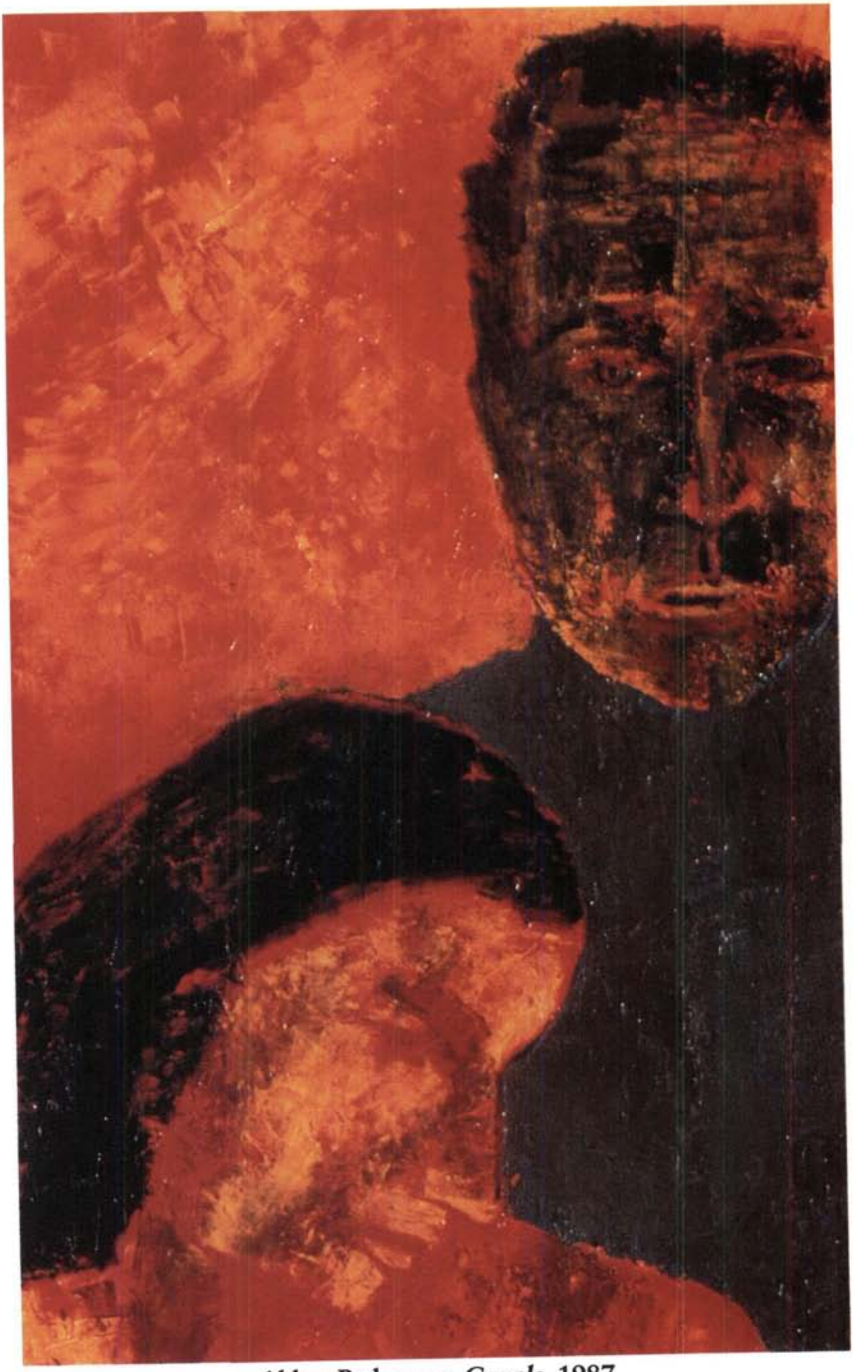
Gulammohamed Sheikh, *Speaking Street*, 1981
(Roopankar Museum of Fine Arts, Bhopal)



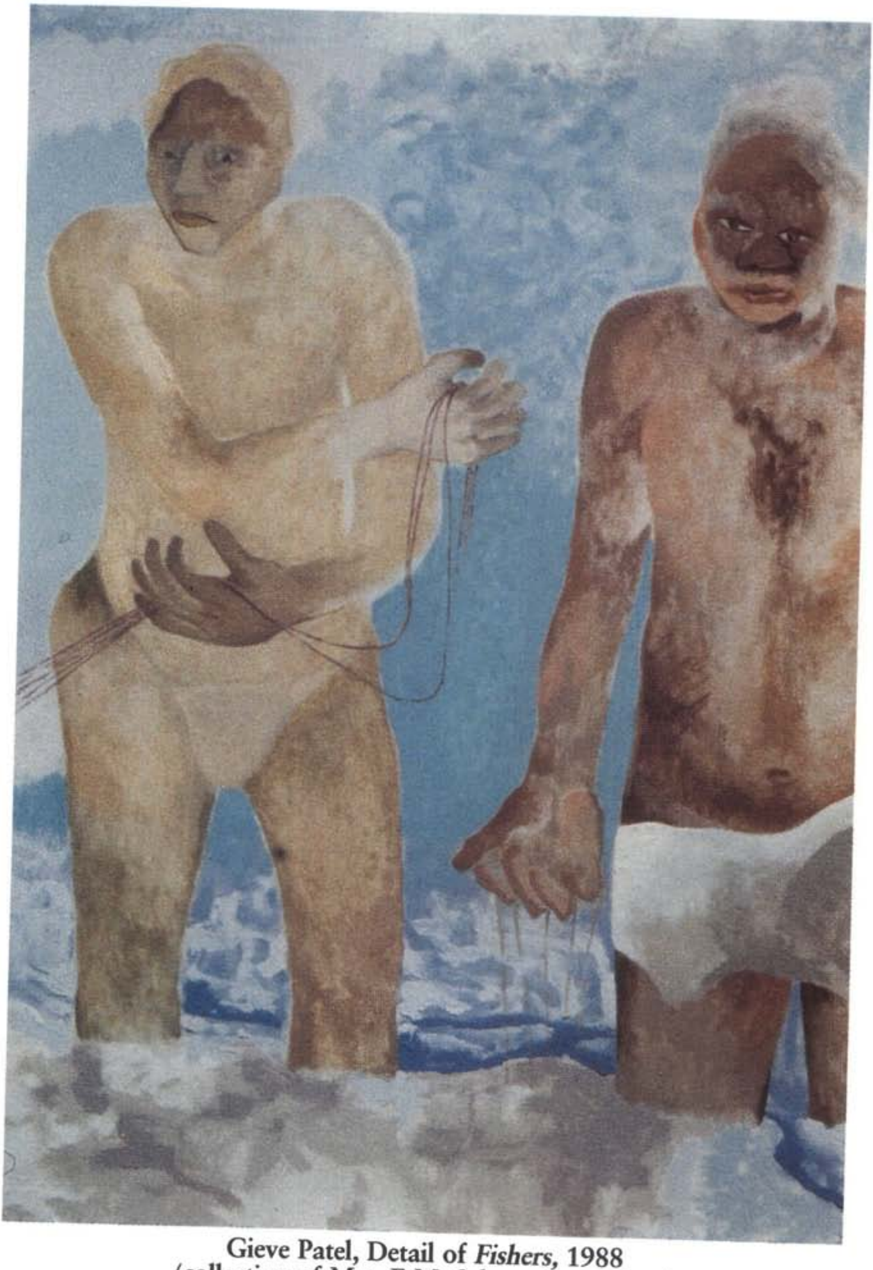
Bhupen Khakhar, *Man Worshipping,* 1984
(Britannia Biscuits, Ltd., Bombay)



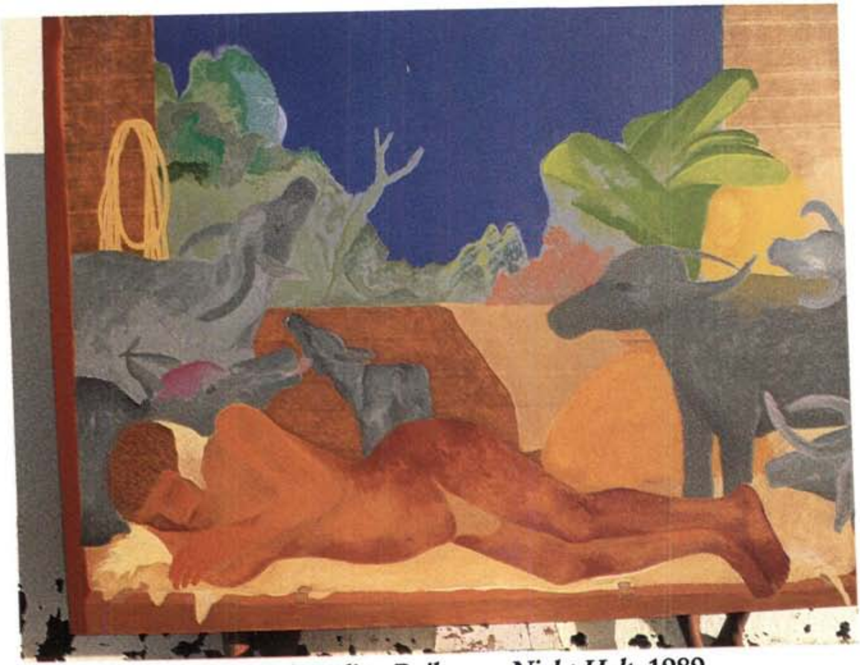
Tyeb Mehta, *Study for Kali,* 1988
(collection of the artist)



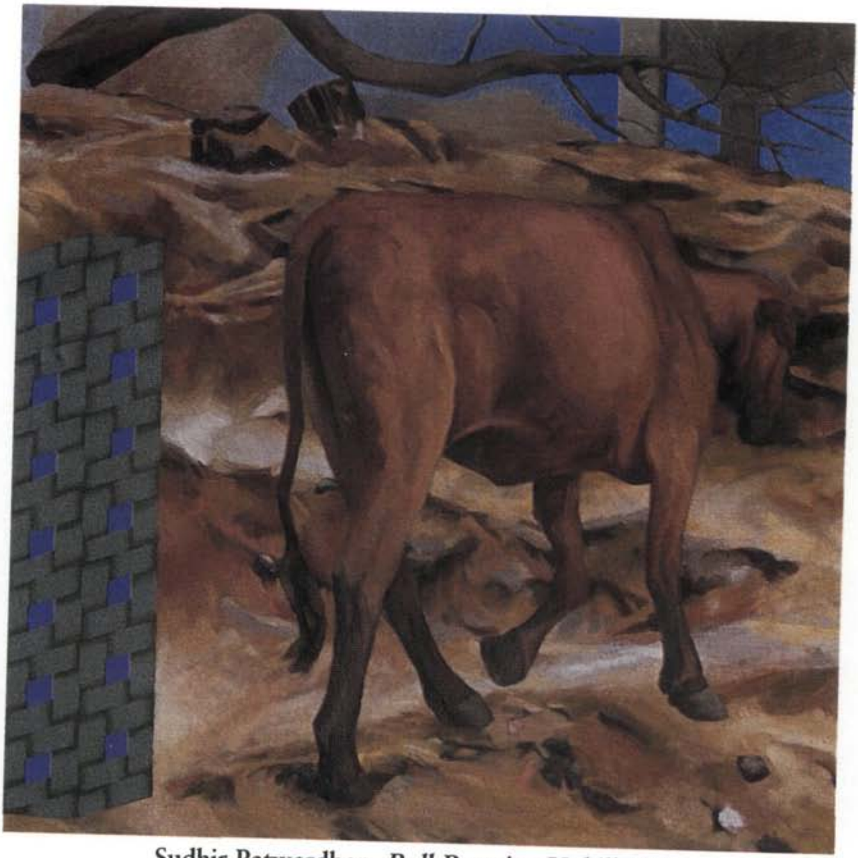
Akbar Padamsee, *Couple*, 1987
(private collection)



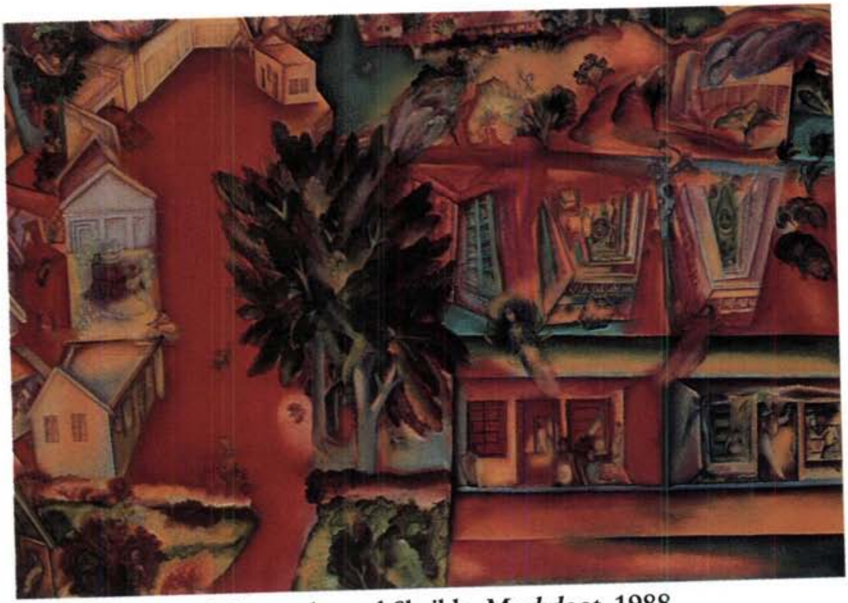
Gieve Patel, Detail of *Fishers*, 1988
(collection of Mrs. E.M. Schoo, Amsterdam)



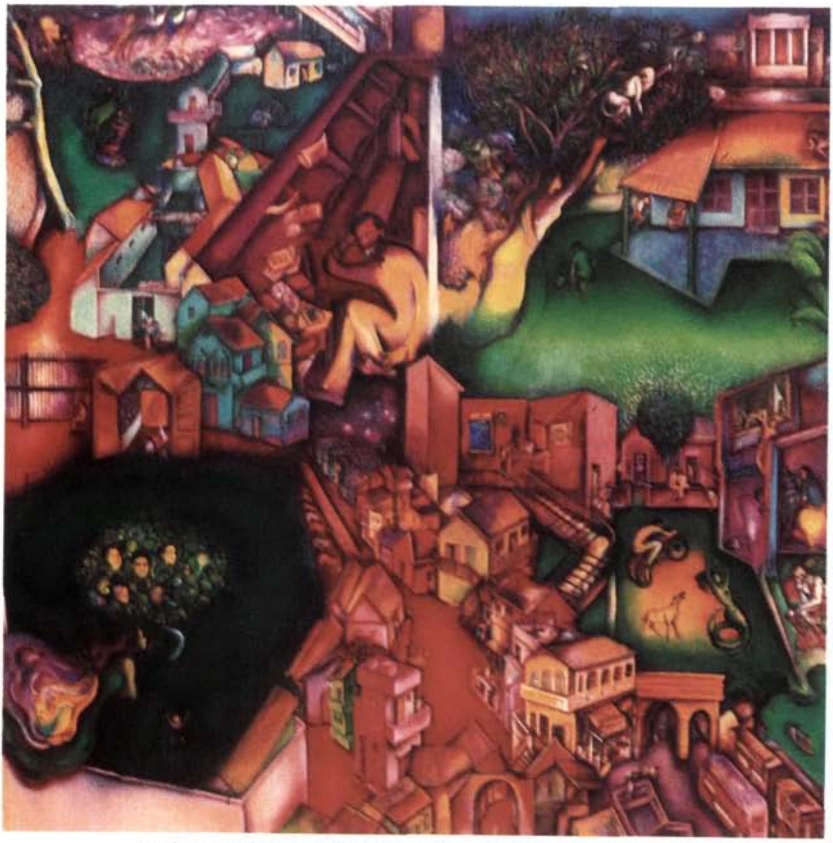
Gieve Patel, *Indian Railways: Night Halt*, 1989
(private collection)



Sudhir Patwardhan, *Bull Running Uphill,* 1988
(Skypack, Bombay)



Gulammohamed Sheikh, *Meghdoot*, 1988
(National Gallery of Modern Art, New Delhi)



Gulammohamed Sheikh, *Revolving Routes,* 1981
(Roopankar Museum of Fine Arts, Bhopal)

retained as an act of will the "clumsy" drawing of the nonprofessional. The manner of laying on paint too is "unpainterly." And this is no mere pose. The untutored look goes well with the direction of the subject matter and his uncompromisingly fresh look at the things he paints. Retained now over a working life of more than twenty-five years, this exquisite style has become to our eyes a new professionalism, one he has earned painstakingly, constantly eschewing the slickness one associates with an easy manner.

The entry to people's homes started as a descriptive venture. The artist visited to record, to comment, to criticize, and to participate. The next step, which may have been latently present from the beginning, was to snoop. In an occasional painting we catch glimpses of furtive things happening between two persons, behind lattices and screens. Those two persons are men. Within three or four years of this kind of presentation, overt depiction of homosexual love appeared. At the same time the landscape acquired a new richness, responding to the feelings of the protagonists, which is something close to a hushed, sometimes a tragic, but always a tender and vibrant communion.

Indigenism was the great issue of the 1960s. I have shown how Khakhar responded to it. It had a variety of spokesmen, each with his own perspective on the issue. Ezekiel's critical writings from this period make an insistent demand for commitment to the local. Art critic Geeta Kapur's[3] writings of the period add up to a theoretical framework supporting such a demand, which she makes independently. J. Swaminathan[4] edited the magazine *Contra* from New Delhi and drew attention to the transcendent aspect of a great deal of imagery in Indian art. And K. G. Subramanyam,[5] then dean of the Fine Art School at Baroda University, influenced a whole generation of painters to see the link between craft and art as one of the permanent glories of this country. He called for the revitalization of this link in the context of contemporary Indian painting.

None of the painters who were outside this movement were actually abandoning local inspiration. Some of them were wary of the overheated emphasis, the jingoistic edge. Padamsee might have said that the local, as the international, is to be internalized, not flaunted. Some of the more brash examples of loyalty to the local in painting would certainly bear out these fears—the constriction of vision till it mirrors one's own small backyard, for instance. But the movement had much more to it than that and has emerged triumphant, to the extent that this entire issue has ceased to be a vexatious point of discussion. The point has been made, errors absorbed, and the area freed of tension. Artists now explore the ground freely, taking from it what they need. They stride with assurance over foreign territory as well, and experience no contradiction in borrowing from there. This too is a great gain won from the debate, the ease of movement acquired across the art of different nations and various periods, without the hang-up of nationalism *and* without the necessity of using art history for fashionable quoting material in your own work. With, concurrently, a matter-of-fact deepening of commitment to the artist's experience of his own country.

A small aside now on the relationship between folk art and urban contemporary painting. Folk art—painting, sculpture, and handicrafts—is a vibrant, living tradition in modern India. It is produced by communities that live in integrated, self-contained units that make connections with various aspects of modern life but are not in the center of it. As the folk artist comes closer to the urban center and moves away from the organic environment that first nourished him, his work seems to deteriorate in quality. This is a tragic fact. No amount of goodwill from anthropologists or attempt at adjustment from artists themselves enables folk art to transcend the dilemma.

But there are uncommon phenomena. Weavers and makers of fabric in many parts of the country have been consistently helped to preserve their traditional designs, also to create new ones on the basis of the old. The work is then marketed in urban centers. This activity, supported by government and private organizations, has scored many successes.

Then again, at Bharat Bhavan, Bhopal, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, J. Swaminathan has initiated a program that invites folk and tribal artists of the region to participate in work with contemporary painters. This is also the only place in India where folk and contemporary art are housed in the same museum, even if in different sections of it.

What of reciprocal dangers, when the urban artist attempts to incorporate folk material into his own work? His work may then suffer from folksiness. It becomes cute, attenuated, or false. Exceptions again: Jamini Roy, working in Bengal in the earlier part of this century, has produced numerous fine works that are folk-inspired. And so has K. G. Subramanyam in our own time.

Gulammohamed Sheikh would not have needed much to rope him in as a devoted advocate of indigenous art. Brought up in a small town in Gujarat, he continues to retain impressions and sensations of the place as part of his waking and dreaming adult life. I have heard few painters talk of the physical environment as a "full-body experience"—why see only with your eyes, says Sheikh, when you can see with so many other organs as well? I quote from an interview:

> It is not that if you see pink you paint pink. A Mewar[6] painter does not use red because there is red earth around him. It has something to do with full-body experience of the environment . . . . this is what makes traditional Indian painting savourable, continuously and repeatedly savourable. Even the space in these paintings is experienced space—space as it is experienced through walks, or from horseback, camel-back, seen from various points of view and seen not only as a human being would but also as various other creatures see. The scientists tell us, don't they, that the way a frog or a fish recognises space is very different from the way we do, and which perception would you call 'real'? A plant that doesn't have eyes can grab at an insect. It too has a sense of space through special organs of its own. I am stretching the point a bit to assert that there are many ways in which a painting may extend our perception.[7]

Trained in Baroda under the tutelage of K. G. Subramanyam, Sheikh readily absorbed many of his mentor's ideas. They were utterly congenial to his own temperament and aspirations. And like many truly creative students, he has fruitfully extended these ideas. Subramanyam's cautious and persistent pointing toward local norms and ideals becomes with Sheikh a rapture of identification. And the validity of this rapture is ultimately borne out because of its further extension, now outside the country! When he speaks of Sienese painting or of Persian miniatures,[8] work of schools for which he has great affinity, it is no longer foreign work that is being discussed. So immediate is his apprehension of it that he might as well be talking about the work of a much-favored Indian contemporary.

Equipped with a full-bodied response to the environment and having decided to paint not any distillation of an experience but to paint "it all," Sheikh has worked out a structure that comes built of a multiplicity of space cells. The inspiration for this comes from various schools of traditional Indian painting that divide the picture space for the narration of a story, except that Sheikh is not relating a clear, sequential story. His canvas grows from detail to detail as the visuals overflow on all sides into contiguous cells. There is great inventiveness in the relationships between cells, and between cells and visions, and all of these together add up and present a unified painting.

The visual routes indicated to the viewer's eyes may be fluid and sequential, or they may overlap, or the panels may require a reading from one horizontal plane to the next, with constant reading back and forth. The painting is to be read substantially through the viewer's own movement. He undertakes a journey. He may choose his itinerary and, with each viewing of the painting, may undertake a different journey. Sheikh calls it "a geography of thought."

Viewed as a whole, the painting is a controlled display of colored sparks that draw you closer and closer, till you begin to identify the details: Residency Bungalow, the old British building where Sheikh lives with his family; Islamic angels hovering over the building; the monkeys of Baroda springing from tree to blossoming tree; lovers absorbed in each other in the cool depths of a room; a public auto rickshaw fanatically tearing through a crowded street; and suddenly, a rioting mob, men being chased, someone set on fire to become an agonized living torch. In this hive of cells, activity is simultaneous, inclusive, in each painting spelling out a large, important chunk of experience in this country today.

We have seen that Akbar Padamsee's response to fragmentation was a drawing inward of vitality to project an image of artistic singularity. Tyeb Mehta may have tried to cope in the same way. His earlier work shows a single figure—a man on a swing, a frontally presented torso, a rickshaw coolie shouldering his load. In each situation it is the depiction of a haunted human being. Sometimes his despair is given expression as an icon of ultimate terror and helplessness—a screaming figure catapulting headfirst into the void. Sometimes the figure of a trussed bull accompanies the human image. The bull is man's mute and uncomprehending victim. But he is also an image of the aggressor's own helplessness before forces he has released and cannot control.

By the 1970s the integrated image no longer sufficed to embody Mehta's intuition of the splintering of things around him. And yet he seems to have shrunk from Khakhar and Sheikh's way out—a full release in multiplicity. Instead, Mehta allowed himself one stark implement, a diagonal of varying color, shape, and dimension, repeatedly cutting the single image into two. The obsessive quality of this device (Mehta was to continue using it for more than a decade) tells us how important it was to the painter. Even so, it may well have been wrenched out of the artist against his will; he might have preferred to continue with the integrated figure if he could. During those heroic ten years, the splintered figure reached at itself across this dismembering lightning, using a variety of means to bridge the gulf and acquire wholeness.

One of the most remarkable fruits of the ultimate resolution of the problem (the diagonal was finally abandoned in the mid-1980s) is a large tryptich painted at the University of Shantiniketan in West Bengal, where the painter spent two years as a visiting artist. It was inspired by a chance happening at a Santhal[9] tribal fair. The artist saw a Santhal priestess, a woman who impressed him with her extraordinarily powerful presence. He then lost sight of her and could not locate her again, though he tried very hard to do so. This occurrence becomes a nucleus for the painting. Also included are other tribal happenings, like the ritual by ordeal—men hooked by their ankles and spun round in the air on poles but quietly contained so that they appear almost as flying figures. And around the strong presence of the woman a clear-eyed, benign world of men and animals is worked, with something approaching classical calm.

Sudhir Patwardhan is currently working on a set of landscapes. He rides his motor scooter ten minutes from his home to arrive at location, which is half a square mile of Thane District in the state of Maharashtra in western India. The hills are quite low and are ocher, dry brown, and red through much of the year. Earth looters have scoured deep chasms out of them for illegal sale of rock and dirt, to support the unchecked mushrooming of building structures in the suburbs adjoining metropolitan Bombay. Trees flourish, bravely fighting industrial pollution and the summer coating of blown dust. Four months in the year, during the monsoon, the surface is wiped clean. The earth becomes loam, the trees exhibit a range of greens, the hills acquire an overlay of fresh grass. Patwardhan records all of this, each small canvas completed on site within two or three sittings.

A first viewing of the works raises the question of why a painter with a secure national reputation would risk doing such commonplace scenes. How do they differ from modest, conventional landscape painting? A second, more perceptive viewing quickly establishes that they have a unique presence and an authentic tone. And what may have seemed commonplace is actually a subtle and purposeful eschewing of personal temperament.

That square mile of Thane District is Patwardhan's world. Close upon the hills and fields, little shanty towns flourish—busy motor repair garages, improvised vegetable markets, tin and cardboard dwellings with TV antennae over them, and gangs of playing children. These small landscapes are the beginnings of an ambitious, extended project the painter has set himself—to reflect and embody the life of this square mile of the world, tree by tree, person by person, so to speak. The following is my description of Patwardhan's painting *Town* (1984). Though it typifies many of the artist's concerns during that period, it demonstrates that the early work is already in many ways a successful preparation for the ambitious project he has now started on:

> Patwardhan uses the well-known device of seeing the town from several different visual angles, and incorporating all of them into one unified image. More of the town is thereby made visible than would normally be possible in the given area of canvas. However, and here is the difference, he takes great care to avoid any uneasy sense of compression, or of optical distortion. We are led to believe that the condensed *and* relaxed scene presented on the canvas is what we would normally see outside it, in any one single moment, with our own two eyes. This is the artifice of the work, a device used to allow us an unhassled entry into one of our very own hassleful towns.
>
> In every other aspect of the painting as well, Patwardhan sticks to his decision to cut out anxiety; and this is our key to understanding the painting. The colours, though very bright, are utterly clear, spaced out, unconfused. Grime, squalor, torn clothing, are largely dispensed with. Even the *nullah*[10] that runs vertically through the top of the picture has a rich, deep indigo effluent! Our familiar sewage and sludge is there all right, but with some one element removed from it, and could that absented element be despair?

> The aim of such a painting is not to give a false impression of small-town life. It is not to evade an honest facing up to its poverty or destitution. Rather, the artist holds this destitution within himself, and gives out instead a view that has corrected some of life's disappointments.[11]

The relinquishing of temperament, opinion, and self-display is Patwardhan's act of conscious humility. Beyond a point it could become an arid exercise, even a mask for the artist's unwillingness to state his real feelings. But when he gets down to his human subject matter, exigency triumphs. You cannot long remain cool and self-effacing in the presence of another human being, as you might before a tree or a town. That human being demands reaction from you: you may either engulf him yourself in a acquisitive tempest of identification (swirls of gobbling paint on the canvas!) or flee and relate to him as best you can from a distance. Patwardhan confronts the choice squarely, in fact uses it as an active working principle for his paintings. He says:

> There are periods where I am neither here nor there. It is in this in-between space that figures closest to my heart take shape. Figures neither far nor near . . . like the distance between me and the stranger in the street or the café. In such figures, close enough to be sensually full-bodied and disquieting, but distanced through the act of observation and depiction, are compounded the pleasures and problems of both extremes. The character and social background of these figures are established and they take on a sociological role . . . but it could well be an autobiographical one.[12]

I end the essay with a short account of some of my own recent work. In 1982 on a brief visit to Italy, I saw Pietro Lorenzetti's *Crucifixion* at Assisi. At home in Bombay I had a large canvas ready to work upon on my return. I'd contemplated doing three or four human figures. As it happened, I ended up doing thirty-six, plus a horse, a dog, and two goats. The crowd at the foot of the cross in the Lorenzetti work spoke to my sense of a Bombay back street and resulted in my painting *Off Lamington Road*. Figures, for once, tumbled out of my brush in an apparently spontaneous mayhem of relationships. A culture that had warmed to the luxuriance of its own humanity had liberated me to confront the prolixity of my own time and place.

However, there is no cross in my painting, though it is present in the sense of buildings looming over the crowd. As in the Lorenzetti, the crowd is restricted to the lower part of the painting. And I believed my debt would end there.

I was mistaken. I had obviously ingested more of that work than I knew. My writhing crowd too was in need of deliverance. And deliverance arrived in the form of a large, non-Christian parrot, plummeting down from the skies straight into a group of dancers who appear to be leaping upward to receive it. Even the dog is affected by its presence. And dog and dancers were done and contemplated way ahead, before any notion whatever of that visitation had crossed my mind! It was a case of unconscious anticipation such as I have not experienced in my work before.

A year before I started on *Off Lamington Road*, I had begun work on a set of heads. Each canvas was to be a small eighteen inches by twenty-four inches. And each would portray one human being. As this activity continued alongside work on the larger painting (which took me all of four years to complete), I sensed an inner dialogue taking place between the two. The heads seemed to assuage a need that the persons I was depicting as a crowd be given individual breathing space as well. "Good," I thought, "if that's how it's going to be." And for subject matter I envisaged, as the heads proliferated, people from various sections of society and stations in life—the vigorous, the ailing, even the dead. A grand sweep.

I am not unhappy with the way several of these heads have taken shape, disaster-prone though they appear to be (note the list: *Leper*, *Eunuch*, *Crushed Head*, *Drowned Woman*). I work in a land of continual underlying violence—of human beings against animals, adults against children, men against women, the strong against the weak. It is not much comfort to turn to the history of other nations and tell oneself that it happens there as well. We are accountable to the place from where we function. I do not wonder that my country has provided the world with two of the greatest proponents of nonviolence. We have most desperately felt the need for them.

Likewise, I felt the need in my own way, in my own small picture gallery, to make room for some of the nation's victims. There is indescribable pleasure in transforming pain and wretchedness into phantasmic play, as though one were thereby gaining so much control over those forces and jettisoning fear. For me it certainly was so, I vouch for that. Perhaps it could be so for the viewer as well.

But I had conceived originally of a more inclusive gallery of beings. As it happens, among them all only the railway worker I painted maintains his somewhat desperate grip on normality. I would like to go back to him and start all over again. Not deny entry to the rest, but temporarily suspend their too-insistent presence. Would it be a task, to find place for the normal as a notion that is not boring, not conformist, not pallid? It might be a responsibility worth considering. In that crowd on Lamington Road, the normal were given their fair share of room and seemed to fit in well enough—the young boy playing in the Lambretta driver's seat while his elder brother chats with a woman friend—and others like them, perhaps because I had as punctuation the wailing lepers and the catatonic nude woman abandoned on the street. But when a normality is given a canvas to itself, even a small one, a breath of doubt flies at you from the caverns of your twentieth-century mind, so well-tutored to inner and outer disasters. It corrodes your momentary self-confidence, and you grope for that celestial parrot's assistance to bail you out.

To conclude: the reader will have noted one clear and important difference between this account of contemporary Indian art and accounts he will have read of art in the West. That is the absence here of successive schools, movements, and manifestos, each attempting to progress beyond the last one in its understanding and portrayal of pictorial space. In fact, the excessive proliferation of such movements in the West in the last thirty years we view with a degree of skepticism. We attribute this quick turnover of art movements and other avant-garde exertions largely to the demands of an aggressive market, a phenomenon many artists in the West too have begun to see as inimical to quiet introspection, the artist's birthright.

The emphasis in India has been on renewal, not on a search for the new, the underlying, unstated belief being that progress is not necessarily a reaching out toward things "never known before." Consequently, here there is very little feeling of undue strain coming from the pressure always to have to make a breakthrough. Add to this that there is no anxious market, and no sharply insistent art criticism to keep us on our toes. We face, then, the danger of complacency and easy self-satisfaction. But our salvation may rest in always heeding the call of our environment, an exhilarating and wildly difficult country that does not long allow you a restful nursing of illusions, if you agree to keep your soul open to it.

BIOGRAPHIES OF THE SIX ARTISTS

Bhupen Khakhar: Born in 1934 in Bombay. He graduated with a degree in economics and commerce, joined a firm of chartered accountants in Bombay, and attended evening art classes. His controversial career began with his first exhibition in 1965. He was featured in George Butcher's selection of Indian art in England in 1966, won an honorable mention in the first Triennale in India in 1968, and was represented in the São Paulo and Menton Biennales.

He taught at Bath Academy, Corsham, England, in 1979 and in the same year had a very successful exhibition in London. Timothy Hyman included him in "Narrative Painting," an important exhibition in Bristol. Howard Hodgkin showed Khakhar's work at the Tate Gallery in 1982 in an exhibition of six Indian artists. An English team has made a film on his life and work.

He exhibited at the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris, in 1986, and in 1984 was rewarded the Padmarshree, a national award of great distinction, by the government of India.

Khakhar continues to work part-time as a chartered accountant. He lives and paints in Baroda.

Tyeb Mehta: Born in 1925 in the village of Kapadvanj in Gujarat. He studied at the J. J. School of Art, Bombay. In 1959 he left for Europe and lived and painted in London for five years. During this period he had exhibitions in London and in Oxford.

He returned to India in 1965. In 1968 he was given an award at India's first Triennale. In the same year he traveled to the U.S.A. on the Rockefeller Fellowship. His work was shown in the exhibition "Art Now in India," organized by the Arts Council of England in 1965. He has also exhibited at the Biennale in Menton, France, the International Festival of Arts at Cagnes-sur-Mer, France, the Royal Academy of London, the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, and the Grey Gallery in New York. He has won the Filmfare Critics' Award for his short film *Koodal*. Mehta now lives and works in Bombay.

Akbar Padamsee: Born in 1928 in Bombay, where he studied at the J. J. School of Art. Immediately afterward, he left for Paris where his work has often been exhibited. A monograph, *Padamsee*, was published by Vakils, Bombay, in 1964.

In 1965 he went to New York on the Rockefeller Fellowship. He was then invited to the Stout State University of Wisconsin as an artist-in-residence and given a show at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Montreal. In 1967 he returned to live in India. There he was awarded the prestigious Nehru Fellowship in 1969.

Padamsee has also made short films, including *Syzygy*, which animates a set of his structural diagrams. He has exhibited in the Biennales at Venice, São Paulo, and Tokyo, and in the Triennales in India. In 1981 a retrospective of his paintings was presented in Bombay and Delhi. His work has been included in exhibitions of Indian art at the Royal Academy in London and at the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford.

Gieve Patel: Born in 1940 in Bombay. As a medical practitioner, he has worked in rural Gujarat at a primary health center. Since 1972 he has been running a private medical clinic in central Bombay, which draws a mix of patients from all classes of society. He is a self-taught artist and in 1967 was art critic for the *Times of India* in Bombay. His paintings were first exhibited in 1966, in Bombay, Delhi, and Calcutta. His work has been shown in exhibitions of Indian painting at the Menton Biennale, the Royal Academy in London, the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, the Grey Art Gallery in New York, and the Halle Sud in Geneva.

Patel is also a well-known writer in English. He has published two collections of verse: *Poems* (1966) and *How Do You Withstand, Body* (1976). His poetry is represented in many anthologies, including *Ten Twentieth-Century Indian Poets* (Oxford University Press) and Penguin's *New Writing in India*. He has written three plays: *Prices*, *Savaksa*, and *Mister Behram*. All three have been performed in Bombay. *Mr. Behram* was published by Praxis in Bombay in 1988. In 1984 he was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship in Washington, D.C.

Sudhir Patwardhan: Born in 1949 in the city of Pune, Maharashtra. He graduated in medicine and since 1975 has been working as a radiologist, first in Bombay city and then in the town of Thane, an hour by train from Bombay. During his college days and later, he was involved with the political left and worked with groups undertaking community education. A self-taught artist, he began exhibiting his paintings in Bombay and Delhi from 1979 on. In 1982 he participated in an exhibition of seven Indian artists touring West Germany, and afterward in a workshop at Braunsweig with well-known German artists. His works have been shown in exhibitions of Indian art at the Royal Academy in London, the Museum of Modern Art in Oxford, the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris, the Halle Sud in Geneva, and the Grey Gallery in New York.

Gulammohamed Sheikh: Born in 1937 in the town of Surendranagar, Saurashtra. He completed a master of arts in painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda University, and started teaching art history there. In 1963 he went to study at the Royal College of Art in London. He traveled extensively, especially in Italy, to see the work of the early Italian masters.

In 1966 he returned to India, took up his teaching post at Baroda, and became deeply engaged with Indian painting, especially Moghul miniatures, on which he writes and lectures. He also writes on contemporary art. During 1969-1973 he edited an art magazine, *Vrishchik*, which played an active part in the artists' protest movement demanding reforms in the Lalit Kala Akademi.

Sheikh is also an important Gujarati poet. His work has appeared in many journals, in *Athawa*, a collection of his own poems, and in English translation in Penguin's *New Writing in India*, edited by Adil Jussawalla (London, 1974). Sheikh has shown at the Biennales in Paris and Tokyo, the Triennale in India, the Royal Academy in London, and the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris. He continues to teach at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda University.

ENDNOTES

Acknowledgment: Most of the material for these biographies is from the catalogue of the show "Contemporary Indian Art" (London, Royal Academy, 1982). The catalogue was conceived and compiled by Geeta Kapur, Akbar Padamsee, and Richard Bartholomew.

[1] Amrita Sher-Gil: born in 1913, in Budapest, of mixed Indo-Hungarian parentage. Later in her life she settled in India and strongly identified with the country. Her paintings are unique examples of a modern artist's response to the people and landscape of this country. She died in 1941 at the age of 28. A good collection of her paintings can be seen at the National Gallery of Modern Art, Jaipur House, New Delhi. It amounts to a national treasure.

[2] Nissim Ezekiel: writer in English, poet, art and literary critic; virtually the pioneer of modern Indian poetry in English. His prose is distinguished by its lucidity and by its bracing ironic and moral tone. He was awarded the Padamashree Award by the government of India in 1988.

[3] Geeta Kapur: her book *Contemporary Indian Artists* (New Delhi: Vikas Publication) is a modern Indian classic. Her many essays in art journals (including *Vrishchik*, edited by G. M. Sheikh) and magazines, and her writings in catalogues all show acuity of judgment over a wide range of works. In 1982 at the Royal Academy in London, she organized an important exhibition giving a vivid picture of Indian painting to British viewers.

[4] J. Swaminathan: a painter and writer awarded the Nehru Fellowship in 1968. He worked on the project "The Significance of the Traditional Numen in Contemporary Art." He edited the magazine *Contra* in the early 1960s, which carried many of his polemical views. Currently he is director of Roopankar, a museum in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh, which carries a unique two-part exhibition of modern urban and contemporary tribal art of India. His paintings have been shown in various important exhibitions in the country and abroad.

[5] K. G. Subramanyam: painter, writer, and one of our foremost educators. Remarkably versatile, he designs children's books and makes toys, fiber sculpture, terra-cotta reliefs, and murals. *Moving Focus*, a book of his essays, was published by Lalit Kala Akademi in 1978. A second book, *The Living Tradition (Perspectives on Modern Indian Art)*, was published by Seagull Books, Calcutta, 1987. He was dean and professor of painting at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Baroda, for thirty years. He is now a professor at the Viswa Bharati University, Shantiniketan, West Bengal. *K. G. Subramanyam*, a monograph by Geeta Kapur, published by Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, appeared in 1987.

[6] Mewar: in Rajasthan, well-known for its unique school of traditional miniature painting.

[7] From the catalogue of the exhibition "Returning Home," paintings by Gulammohamed Sheikh shown at the Centre Georges Pompidou, September-November 1985.

[8] From the catalogue of the exhibition "Returning Home": "Persian painters used fields of rose, magenta and mauve, and I could obtain these *sensations* from the environment when travelling from the south of Iran to Shiraz, and to Tehran."

[9] Santhal: an aborigine tribe in Bengal and eastern India.

[10] *Nullah*: an open drain.

[11] From the *Sunday Observer*, Bombay, 30 December 1984.

[12] From the catalogue of an exhibition of paintings by Sudhir Patwardhan at the Centre Georges Pompidou, March-May 1986.

Indian Fiction Today

Anita Desai

The changing landscapes of life—politics, geography, hunger, love—are explored in contemporary Indian fiction, as in literature of the country's past. While current literary styles are experimented with, writers grapple with what is ever present in the Indian world: a coexistence of tradition and modernity. A character in R. K. Narayan's story is both "from far away" and going "far away again," not unlike Indian authors today. And like the cave Anita Desai's character Baumgartner visits, fiction is something steeped with India of the future and the past; Baumgartner senses air "breathing malignly down his neck" like so much history. Indian authors are impelled by a knowledge of the past and a visionary stance toward the present; they take keen notice of the struggles and victories that sustain their nation.

The words *Russian literature* instantly evoke a picture of a dacha in a birch wood, a samovar, white nights and black forests, and an impression of what V. S. Pritchett called the Russian "sense of justice and mercy and the inner life." Similarly, the words *American literature* conjure up pictures of the red soil of cotton fields, log cabins by the Mississippi, and high-rise commotion in inner cities, and

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powerfully convey the air of life, liberty, and license pursued by her writers. Then what do the words *Indian literature* evoke?

Above all, its antiquity, traditions that go so far back in time as to enter a primeval world that is arboreal rather than pastoral, a formal wilderness in which sages live and courtesans dance. But if such images were ever apposite, are they relevant now? That magical idyll is surely torn to shreds by today's strife, riots, and commotion, and the tranquil scene overtaken by events of ferocious injustice and the obsessive struggle for survival. The bedrock is no longer made up of the old orthodoxies of religion, caste, and family; everywhere are fissures, explosions, shatterings.

Does today's literature reflect the violence, plurality, and volatility of the Indian scene? Or its comforts, solaces, and exuberances? Which of the ancient themes have survived and which sunk out of sight forever? Which have emerged and overtaken them?

If we were to read large chunks of Indian writing in order to gather fresh impressions, one that would be sure to strike us is the underlying unity of the scene—a unity that belies the fissiparousness of the Indian scene, a unity that can give the impression of repetition and monotony. Why do all Indian writers describe a landscape with the stock features of a mango grove, a river bank, cattle raising dust along a village path, a village well, and a crescent moon? We could go further and say that every mother we meet is self-sacrificing and hardworking, every father stern and authoritarian, every money-lender cruel and vicious, every peasant ignorant and starving. To make such statements is to make sweeping generalizations but, to tell the truth, when we look around we do not find all that many exceptions. We realize that exceptions are not what is wanted—what *is* wanted, what continues to give satisfaction, the satisfaction of the familiar and not the unexpected, is ever new variations on old themes. Witness the phenomenal success of the Ramayana as a television serial!

The fact is that the Indian writer uses characters, as he does features of the landscape, to represent wider truths. He does not see a character—or a tree, an ox, or a hill—as unique and particular; they merely symbolize the larger concepts that he regards as the only fit subjects for art. And so a river represents all rivers, a tree all trees, a lover all lovers—of gods, and men.

Nowhere is this more evident than in Indian poetry—Urdu, Sanskrit, or whatever—but it is present in fiction too, from Rabindranath Tagore's 1915 novel, *The Home and the World*, where Bimala represents both Mother India in her "earthen-red sari with its blood-red border" and the mother goddess Durga, to Salman Rushdie's 1983 novel, *Shame*, in which Sufiya Zenobia embodies the shame of a nation that denies that emotion and flaunts shamelessness instead. In between the work of these two writers are countless novels in which peasants do what they are supposed to do—suffer and starve—women perform their womanly duties (which are those of the female deities), the rich portray greed, sensuality, and cruelty, and the savior comes to earth in the form of Brahma, Shiva, or Mahatma Gandhi (as in *Kanthapura*).

Not only is the Indian writer constantly aware of the other world of which the visible, palpable one is merely one aspect, but so are his characters. The villagers who live in Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* see a shooting star in the night sky and instinctively exclaim, "Some good soul has left the earth," and so forget their earlier heated discussion of caste. Even in the mundane world of Malgudi, with no pretensions to being anything but what it is—a small town in South India—R. K. Narayan's cobbler reminds the reader of that "otherness":

> "I ask God every day and keep asking every hour. But when he is a little free he will hear me. Till then, I have to bear it."
>
> "What? Bear what?"
>
> "This existence. I beg him to take me away. But the time has not come. It'll come."

Till then, he is simply a cobbler, in Malgudi. But he has reminded the reader of that other time, that other world in which he could be—a king? a saint? a shooting star?

It is hard to say if such philosophy, such religiosity, will survive in the writing of modern India. Gita Mehta's handling of the theme of *guru-chela*, the religious leader and the pilgrim, in *Karma Cola*, shocked Indian readers by its satire and parody; they failed to notice that the satire was directed against those who belittled or demeaned the higher truths.

When Arun Kolatkar wrote his poems about the temple town of Jejuri in 1974, he had the personage Manohar enter an open door "wondering / which god he was going to find" and turn away "when a wide-eyed calf / looked back at him. / It isn't another temple / he said / it's just a cow-shed." But the fact remains that the whole cycle of poems was built on the foundations of a temple town, a place of pilgrimage. To ignore that element in Indian life would be to amputate Indian thought and letters from one of its fundamentals—and for the writer to deliver an incomplete or amputated creature to the reader.

Another aspect of Indian thought that at one time seemed to be disappearing from Indian literature, influenced as it was by Western literature from the nineteenth century onward, and that has now returned alive and well, is the cyclical interpretation of time, which gives Indian literature, and all Indian art, its distinctive structure. In *The Speaking Tree*, Richard Lannoy wrote of the "unified field awareness" of the Indian which expressed itself in the art of the cave sanctuaries and in Sanskrit drama, and pointed out that in the classical age all literature was written on uniform strips of palm leaves, each strip containing a brief portion of the whole, a *sutra* or a *sloka*, to be read or scanned cyclically, displaying a synchronic rather than a diachronic attitude. Raja Rao, in the introduction to *Kanthapura*, wrote:

> Our paths are paths interminable. . . . we have neither punctuation nor the treacherous "ats" and "ons" to bother us—we tell one interminable tale. Episode follows episode, and when our thoughts stop, our breath stops, and we move on to another thought. This was and still is the ordinary style of our story-telling.

It was the style he adopted for *Kanthapura* and for *The Serpent and the Rope*. He had in mind the models of the Puranas, the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata—where the reader, or more commonly the listener, would take up the thread at any point, read or listen for a while, drift away, and then return for another episode.

To the Indian, the linear development of Western thought is strange and unfamiliar—even unnecessary. The Indian reader, like the Indian philosopher, sees time as a cycle, a wheel, ever turning, ever changing—not as a sequence of events, beginning at the beginning and ending with the climax. The Victorian novel did have its effect on the early novelists of India and it was the model for their work, but the Indian writer has never shown the Western writer's gift for exciting narrative in which event follows event till the climax is achieved—there are neither Graham Greenes in Indian literature nor Agatha Christies nor Jeffrey Archers. It is hard to find a taut, tightly structured novel in which each component counts and each works to move the narrative further, in which nothing lies idle or is wasted. The pace of the Indian novel has remained slower—it rambles, it sprawls, it meanders off into diversions.

And it is interesting to see that after twenty years in which the novel was written more or less on the Western model, in *Midnight's Children* Salman Rushdie wound the straight line of narrative into a circle and the serpent was seen to eat its own tail again:

> There are so many stories to tell, too many, such an excess of intertwined lives events miracles places rumours, so dense a commingling of the improbable and the mundane! I have been a swallower of lives; and to know me, just the one of me, you'll have to swallow the whole lot as well.

Critics pointed out that he had entered the Latin American world of "magical realism," to which he replied that he had reentered the older world of the Mahabharta, which was the true originator of magical realism. In *Shame* Rushdie mythologized still-living people and turned events in living memory into fantastic legends. The close was made distant, the distant close. Time and perspective altered and telescoped before our eyes.

Immediately there was a flood of younger writers delighted to return to the old style of story telling that was strangely the "latest" and "newest" style. In following his trajectory they found themselves traveling so far westward that, the world being in the shape it is, they had arrived in the east again.

One finds the same phenomenon present where language is concerned. For so many years the Victorian novel influenced the Indian novel, whether written in Bengali or Malayalam, its rules and artifices affecting even the language, but in the 1930s and 1940s experiments were already being made—by G. V. Desani, by Raja Rao—to bring into literature the accents, rhythms, and tones of Indian speech. Still, it was a literary language they invented, and that did not go very far in a country where the printed word has always had a separate existence from the spoken word. There is a language for books and a language for conversation, and the two are not the same—so we were taught in school and so we believed. R. Prawer Jhabvala's success in reproducing Indian speech rhythms in English were ignored because she did not have the right credentials—she is not Indian. It was Salman Rushdie again, in *Midnight's Children*, who finally brought the spoken language off the streets onto the printed page, with such energy and electricity that the Indian reader was finally won over and the Indian writer saw the two tongues as one. And so we find we are back in the days of oral story telling, when the language employed had to be accessible, demotic, of and for the people.

As was to be expected, there was a long trail of imitators. The earliest—Namita Gokhale and Balrai Khanna—were capable of only the crudest imitations, but the novels of Amitav Ghosh, I. Allan Sealy, and Upamanyu Chatterjee have shown a growing sophistication in using that demotic manner. Clearly, the tongues of Indian writers—so to speak—have been set free from inhibition and have found confidence. Suddenly it was made apparent that the Indian writer had as distinctive and authentic a voice as the American or the Caribbean.

Whatever the quality of such prose, its writers certainly have a new confidence, a new ease and comfortableness that points to new beginnings. Where will that take us? The excerpts I have chosen may offer some directions.

Excerpts

From All About H. Hatterr, *by G. V. Desani*

An excerpt from the definitive sixth edition of *All About H. Hatterr*, by G. V. Desani, copyright © 1970, 1972, 1986, by permission of the author and the publisher, McPherson & Company, POB 1126, Kingston, New York 12401.

I started out of the office to interview the suburban Sage.

It was a dam' hot day.

After a long ride in the tram, I marched nearly four miles in the blazing sun.

Tropical sun produces thirst.

My taste in drinks is not inferior, but the heat, and the availability of what was available, made me give in.

I stopped at the wayside bamboo stalls and had five or six glasses of *todii.*

Though duly fermented, it is a dam' potent stuff, with a kick of a fighting Barcelona bull attached, it is the true beer of the tropics.

Having the drink for the first time in my life, physically, it made me more thirsty: and, mentally, it brought on me a feeling of *extreme humility*!

After some more walking, and the last additional glass of *todii*, away from nowhere, I sighted the Sage's hut.

His disciple received me solemnly, without uttering a word.

But for his loin-cloth, he was entirely nude.

I could not help noticing his stomach, the largest, damme, I had yet seen!

Thereon—as the Eastern religion has held that there is no difference between flesh and *ash*—he had rubbed much of *ash.*

Maybe because I was tired, maybe it was the *todii* effect telling on me, but as soon as I saw that man's stomach, a tremendous feeling of awe overpowered me.

I wanted to go down on my knees, impromptu-like, salaam like hell, beat a tom-tom, and *worship* the feller's tummy, as if it were a demi-god, unattached, and independent of him!

He led me into the hut, meanwhile, affording me no time to make a sincere obeisance to his abdomen, like I wanted to so much.

Inside, surrounded by swarms of mosquitoes, which were making a sharp, Indian pipe-like sound, I saw, squatting on the floor, a very tall man.

He was lean, ash-bathed, his hair matted, and he had a long beard.

His eyes were closed in meditation.

On seeing his venerable countenance, I hastened to touch his feet with my forehead.

With due regard to the feeling of utter humility and awe which was upon me, I considered myself lucky to have the ash off his feet on my forehead!

"O Sage of the Wilderness," I said presently, in the vernacular, to that countenance devoid of all expression, "I am a newspaper reporter. Interview me. Please, master, utter a few words of wisdom, and, through your humble, comfort the reading classes. Earn merit from thy act of piety, O adorned with ash!"

He sighed, and opened his eyes.

When I saw deep into those tar-black eyes of his, I felt so *humble*, you have my word!

His face was the most contented I had yet seen out East.

And I wanted to cry on his shoulder, lie prone at his feet in abject adoration, and tell him all about my troubles: about my unhappy birth and after, about my constant search for my mother, about giving the old lady everything she should want, about the Club, about my great ambition to win the world's admiration by a startling daring deed, about establishing H. Hatterr dynasty, my own kids, oh, everything!

"My son," said the Sage of the Wilderness to me in a benign whisper, meanwhile, and overlooking my emotion, "extend thy palm."

I extended my palm.

The Sage then raised his hand, and from the swarm of mosquitoes flying nearest him, he gently caught a handful.

Emptying the buzzing things on my palm, he said, "Throw away these items of life outside the hut, my son, or, altern, if you wish charity, give them to my disciple to consume."

I was dumbfounded, having never seen such anticlimax behaviour!

I held the mosquitoes tight in my fist, and ran outside like hell.

I released them there, a good many having been choked from sheer want of ozone.

And I returned to the hut.

Said the Sage to me, after the incident, in an excessively soft voice, "Thou art laudably intelligent, O nephew! A fool would have ventured the minute creatures to my disciple, and caused him stomach-ache. I am glad upon thee. Thou art pleasant. We shall feed together. Hast brought the eatables?"

From Waiting for the Mahatma, *by R. K. Narayan*

From R. K. Narayan's *Waiting for the Mahatma* (University of Chicago Press, 1981) with permission from the Wallace Literary Agency on behalf of the author. Copyright © 1955, Michigan State University Press.

"Where are you coming from?"

"From far away," said Sriram.

"Where are you going?" the other asked.

"Far away again," said Sriram, attempting to be as evasive as possible. The other laughed, treating it as a nice joke. The man supported himself by clutching with one hand a rope dangling from the ceiling. It was a box-like little shop made entirely of old packing cases, with a seat cushioned with gunny sacks for the proprietor to sit on. Bottles containing aerated water in rainbow colours adorned his top shelf, bunches of green bananas hung down by nails in front of his shop, almost hitting one in the face, and he had several little boxes and shallow tins filled with parched rice, fried gram, peppermints, sugar candy, and so forth. He enjoyed Sriram's joke so much that he asked, "I have some nice biscuits, won't you try them?"

"Are they English biscuits?" Sriram asked.

"The best English biscuits."

"How can you be sure?"

"I got them through a friend in the army. They are supplied only to the army now. Purely English biscuits which you cannot get for miles around. In these days, no one else can get them."

"Have you no sense of shame?" Sriram asked.

"Why, why, what is the matter?" the other said, taken aback, and then said, "Hey, give me the money for what you took and get out of here. You are a fellow in Khadi, are you? Oh! Oh! I didn't notice. And so you think you can do what you like, talk as you like, and behave like a rowdy."

"You may say anything about me, but don't talk ill of this dress. It is—it is—too sacred to be spoken about in that way."

The shopman felt cowed by his manner and said, "All right, sir, please leave us alone and go your way. I don't want you lecturing here. Your bill is two annas and six pies. . . two bananas one anna each, and soda six pies. . . . "

"Here it is," Sriram said, taking out of his tiny purse two small coins and a six pie piece and passing them to him.

"You see," the other said, softening, "this is not the season for bananas and so they are not as cheap as they might be."

"I am not questioning your price, but I want you to understand that you should not be selling foreign stuff. You should not sell English biscuits."

"All right, sir, hereafter I will be careful, after I dispose of the present stock."

"If you have any pride as an Indian you will throw the entire stock in the gutter and won't let even a crow peck at it. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," said the shopman, not liking the little circle of watchful people who were gathering. At the end of the street the lecture platform was being set up with groups of people standing around watching. The villagers were very happy, some lively business was going on there as well as starting here. The shopman saw an old enemy of his who liked to see him in trouble standing on the edge of the crowd with a grin on his face. As if to satisfy him, the gods had brought this man in Khadi here, a born trouble-maker. He appealed to Sriram, "Now sir, please go away a little. I must close the shop."

"You may close the shop if you like but I want you to destroy those biscuits," said Sriram firmly.

"What biscuits?" asked the shopman alarmed. "Please leave me alone, sir."

From Karma-Cola, *by Gita Mehta*

From *Karma-Cola: Marketing the Mystic East*, by Gita Mehta.

I know an Indian boy who used to listen to rock and roll. Then he got religion. He found a guru.

One day the devotee had his hands raised in supplication when the guru said to him,

"Your watch is not accurate. Take it off and give it to me."

The boy did so. The guru examined the watch and then returned it to the devotee. The boy was about to slide it back on his wrist when he noticed that the watch had changed. Now it was not only accurate, but it also told the time in New York and London, it had a meter for recording the depths of water, and it registered the date.

The devotee was staggered.

"How did you do that?" he asked the guru.

"You really want to know?" said his Master.

"Yes, yes, Swami, I do," exclaimed the boy.

"Look at the inscription on the back," counseled the Master.

The boy turned the watch over and found engraved on his changed and wonderful timepiece the following words:

Guru Industries, Ltd.

From Baumgartner's Bombay, *by Anita Desai*

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On one of these business trips, Baumgartner found he had to change trains at a small junction out in the flat, red-soiled barren country where he would have to waste nearly a whole day. The train from Bombay deposited him there on a blazing morning with the sun pouring on to the corrugated iron roof like smelt from a foundry, then drew away, leaving him on a wooden bench, mopping his neck with a handkerchief that grew quickly soiled and grubby, and idly watching a miserable pair of rhesus monkeys in a small pipal tree that they had stripped of leaves, grooming each other with dissatisfied expressions on their small pinched faces. Other travellers lay on mats or bedrolls spread out on the station platform, only once in a while raising a hand to brush away flies or languidly wave a palm leaf fan. Coolies in their red shirts sat on their haunches smoking *bidis* and waiting for the next train to arrive. A station-master in a white uniform badly in need of washing, ironing and mending, came out of his office to advise Baumgartner to eat. "It is not good to sit for so long without food," he reprimanded Baumgartner who was surprised: surely the station-master ought to know his timetable and understand the reason why Baumgartner had such a long wait. To placate the man—perhaps he was preventing him from going off to enjoy his own lunch—he got up and went to a food barrow where a vendor served him with some potato fritters in a leaf cup. Afraid that the station-master might be watching, Baumgartner tried to eat them but the chillies defeated him and he let them drop under the bench. Instantly a stray dog dashed up and snatched it as though a whole horde were after it, and some crows did soon alight to try and get a share. Baumgartner took a cup of sweet milky tea from the vendor and drank that although it made him mop his face even more frequently. The afternoon slowly dragged itself over the breadth of the corrugated iron roof, then finally began to fall westwards. There were still some hours to wait—Baumgartner's train did not arrive till late in the evening. Why had no one warned him? He felt anger at being sent off uninformed and unprepared but, as usual, the anger rebounded on him, its ultimate cause.

It made him get to his feet and walk down the length of the platform and out of the station. Behind the station sheds and yards there was a township of a sort—some stucco houses with doors painted green and blue and pink, several shacks of tin and rag and cardboard. Open gutters ran outside them along which children squatted, women washed and dogs lapped. They looked up in suspicious amazement to see him pass but he tried not to meet their eyes, to walk on. The vendors of cigarettes and soft drinks called to him from their barrows but he wanted neither. There were grain and oil stores, the usual workshop with lathes and sparkling welding machines. String cots were dragged out into the dust of lanes, and cooking fires lit. When he had walked past and left behind these habitations, he came upon some cattle foraging for fodder in the dry, friable soil of the barren land, a herdsboy sitting on a stone, whistling. He walked on, leaving them behind too.

The road petered out into the stony dirt. There was no sign of fields, of agriculture, or irrigation or habitation. There was the red sandy dust, and the black volcanic rocks. The dumb unrelenting flatness of the iron earth at last gave way to a slight swell. Baumgartner, unable to face the walk back through the township again, decided to climb that low hill, if such a name could be given it. Who knows, he sighed, perhaps on the *other* side there was something to see—golden valley, flowering grove or still pool. He had to laugh at his own stupidity. No, of course, there would be nothing but this red dust, this black stone, sun and barren space. But perhaps the hilltop offered something—at least there was a tumble of rocks to be seen on it, crouching like a beast for protection from heights, views, space. He would go up and sit there for a while. The dust crept into his shoes, lay in a red film on his socks and trouser cuffs, and the stones stubbed against his toes. Still, a little movement could be felt in the air—not exactly a breeze, but at least a stir, and it gave him the energy to complete that climb.

Yes, there were rocks piled there on the bony spine of the hill. Baumgartner surmised that they had been placed together to form a kind of cave. It was clearly no temple of famed carvings and fabulous idols such as heaped the rest of the country with their artistic splendour—no, it was Baumgartner's luck to have come to a part of the country that had been left out of such abundance—but he felt it must be something ancient and primitive anyway.

He stood for a while on that mean summit, while a pair of kites wheeled in the colourless, featureless sky as if they had sighted him and were wondering if he was worthy prey before they swooped. Baumgartner remembered stories he had heard of eagles who were fed at a temple, who flew free and ranged everywhere but returned every evening to be fed by the temple priest. Where was that temple? Not this one, of course. No one could have heard of this one, there was nothing to say about it and it was probably nameless. He was, in fact, not quite certain that it was a temple at all. True, now that he had paused and looked about him, he could see that there was a path of sorts leading from the small town across the flat land to this hillock—he saw its grey trail through the rusty earth from this height. So it was used, people came here, to see—what?

Finally he lowered himself to fit the crack that made an entrance into the rocks, and found that if he overcame his squeamishness about dark places, it was possible to enter. He edged his large bulk into the small space bravely and for a moment struggled with a vision of having his face clawed by escaping birds or—worse—bats. He could smell them, that rank urinary odour that one could expect in such dark caves. But he heard no squeak of bat voices or flap of bat wings; they had left only their odour here. Or was it that? Could it perhaps belong to something else—like an idol?

Although his eyes were growing accustomed to the dark, he still could make out nothing in that inner chamber. There was no vent or shaft for light or air. Although it was so well sealed from the heat of the sun, it was not cool either; on the contrary, the heat seemd to thicken and congeal here, like spilt blood, into a dark clot.

Very cautiously Baumgartner moved forwards, his feet feeling the uneven surface of the stone flooring. When he thought he was in the centre of the chamber, he stopped. Actually, it was something that stopped him, but he could not tell what. Neither his feet nor his outstretched hands struck anything. He had heard nothing. But he was certain there was an object there. Trying to stand still and breathe calmly, he told himself it could be an idol. What kind of idol? Could it be that black, engorged penis he had seen in roadside shrines, or an oxen hump, placid and bovine, some swollen udder of blood? He strained his eyes to see but his eyes had never met with such total blackness. The darkness itself was a presence. Abandoned the temple might be but he could swear it was not empty. Something was blocking the chamber, emanating a stench, and watching *him*, with an uncanny stealth, not betraying itself by the slightest sound or motion. The silence thundered in his ears. After listening to its beat for a long time, he finally lowered his head—he could hear the small bones of his neck grate against each other—and down by his foot he made out a flat slab of black stone and upon it a rounded projection, also of black stone. The reason he could make it out in that thick darkness was that someone had smeared it with red powder, or paste, which reflected some small trickle of light that came through the slit of the entrance. Something fragile and dry lay curved around it—perhaps a marigold garland, dried up. Perhaps a snake skin, or even a snake. What did this black stone profess to be that it was so honoured? Baumgartner would have liked to know. The chamber seemed to hold a secret. If Baumgartner could find out that secret—

He swivelled his head slowly, listening to the bones creak. But there was no one to tell him—no priest, no pilgrim. No voice, no song, not even a dim inscription scratched into the black fur that coated the stones.

He was certain now that there was nothing here but what he could dimly make out. Then what was it that was so stealthily watching him, breathing so malignly down his neck, raising the small hairs on his back as if he were faced with danger, with death? It had to be something, even if only a deadly spider, or scorpion. But it was not that kind of fear and Baumgartner knew it was not a spider or a scorpion. It was just a stone. A black blob, spat out by some disdainful god, to land at his feet and then solidify, blocking his way.

Definitely he had a sense of being stopped. He was to go no further. He had arrived at the final barrier. And what was that—death? Was this temple occupied by death? Was it the scene of some hideous human sacrifice? One read of them, from time to time, in the papers. Even of cannibalistic rites, tantric magic. Had some drugged creature, animal or human, been dragged up here to be decapitated, to spill the crimson stuff out of its unstoppered self and water this immutable black blob of god-spit, god-sputum? Perhaps it was death that lay there in a heap, a heap of death piled up, as casually as dog's turds, saying to Baumgartner—the end, no more.

But Baumgartner would not have its no. He turned and scrambled out of the narrow exit with such speed that he scratched his arms against the stone, hurt his knee against its rib, and fell out on to the hillside, as if ejected by whatever possessed or inhabited that temple. Indigestible, inedible Baumgartner. The god had spat him out. *Raus*, Baumgartner, out. Not fit for consumption, German or Hindu, human or divine.

Half-way down the track, laughing in humiliation and mortification as he rubbed his scratched elbows, Baumgartner knew he had been expelled from some royal presence. Go, Baumgartner. Out. He had not been found fit. Shabby, dirty white man, *firanghi*, unwanted. *Raus*, Baumgartner, *raus*.

From Shame, *by Salman Rushdie*

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I must proceed in this way, by explaining how it was that Bilquìs grew frightened of the hot afternoon wind called the Loo:

On the last morning of his life, her father Mahmoud Kemal, known as Mahmoud the Woman, dressed as usual in a shiny blue two-piece suit shot with brilliant streaks of red, looked approvingly at himself in the ornate mirror which he had removed from the foyer of his theatre on account of its irresistible frame of naked cherubs shooting arrows and blowing golden horns, hugged his eighteen-year-old daughter, and announced: "So you see, girl, your father dresses finely, as befits the chief administrative officer of a glorious Empire." And at breakfast, when she began dutifully to spoon khichri on to his plate, he roared in good-natured fury, "Why do you lift your hand, daughter? A princess does not serve." Bilquìs bowed her head and stared out of the bottom left-hand corner of her eyes, whereupon her father applauded loudly. "O, too good, Billoo! What elite acting, I swear!"

It's a fact, strange-but-true, that the city of idolaters in which this scene took place—call it Indraprastha, Puranaqila, even Delhi—had often been ruled by men who believed (like Mahmoud) in Al-Lah, The God. Their artifacts litter the city to this day, ancient observatories and victory towers and of course that great red fortress, Al-Hambra, the red one, which will play an important part in our story. And, what is more, many of these godly rulers had come up from the humblest of origins; every schoolchild knows about the Slave Kings . . . but anyway, the point is that this whole business of ruling-an-empire was just a family joke, because of course Mahmoud's domain was only the Empire Talkies, a fleapit of a picture theatre in the old quarter of the town.

"The greatness of a picture house," Mahmoud liked to say, "can be deduced from the noisiness of its customers. Go to those deelux palaces in the new city, see their velvet thrones of seats and the mirror tiling all over the vestibules, feel the air-conditioning and you'll understand why the audiences sit as quiet as hell. They are tamed by the splendour of the surroundings, also by the price of the seats. But in the Empire of Mahmoud the paying customers make the very devil of a din, except during the hit song numbers. We are not absolute monarchs, child, don't forget it; especially in these days when the police are turning against us and refuse to come and eject even the biggest badmashes, who make whistlings that split your ears. Never mind. It is a question of freedom of individuals, after all."

Yes: it was a fifth-rate Empire. But to Mahmoud it was quite something, a Slave King's estate, for had he not begun his career out on the suppurating streets as one of those no-account types who push the movie adverts around town on wheelbarrows, shouting, "it is now-showing!" and also "Plans filling up fast!"—and did he not now sit in a manager's office, complete with cashbox and keys? You see: even family jokes run the risk of being taken seriously, and there lurked in the natures of both father and daughter a literalism, a humourlessness owing to which Bilquìs grew up with an unspoken fantasy of queenhood simmering in the corners of her downcast eyes. "I tell you," she would apostrophize the angelic mirror after her father had left for work, "with me it would be absolute control or zero! These badmashes would not get away with their whistling shistling if it was my affair!" Thus Bilquìs invented a secret self far more imperious than her father the emperor. And in the darkness of his Empire, night after night, she studied the giant, shimmering illusions of princesses who danced before the rackety audience beneath the gold-painted equestrian figure of an armoured medieval knight who bore a pennant on which was inscribed the meaningless word *Excelsior*. Illusions fed illusions, and Bilquìs began to carry herself with the grandeur befitting a dream-empress, taking as compliments the taunts of the street-urchins in the gullies around her home: "Tantara!" they greeted her as she sailed by, "Have mercy, O gracious lady, O Rani of Khansi!" *Khansi-ki-Rani*, they named her: queen of coughs, that is to say of expelled air, of sickness and hot wind.

"Be careful," her father warned her, "things are changing in this city; even the most affectionate nicknames are acquiring new and so-dark meanings."

This was the time immediately before the famous moth-eaten partition that chopped up the old country and handed Al-Lah a few insect-nibbled slices of it, some dusty western acres and jungly eastern swamps that the ungodly were happy to do without. (Al-Lah's new country: two chunks of land a thousand miles apart. A country so improbable that it could almost exist.) But let's be unemotional and state merely that feelings were running so high that even going to the pictures had become a political act. The one-godly went to these cinemas and the washers of stone gods to those; movie-fans had been partitioned already, in advance of the tired old land. The stone-godly ran the movie business, that goes without saying, and being vegetarians they made a very famous film: *Gai-Wallah*. Perhaps you've heard of it? An unusual fantasy about a lone, masked hero who roamed the Indo-Gangetic plain liberating herds of beef-cattle from their keepers, saving the sacred, horned, uddered beasts from the slaughterhouse. The stone-gang packed out the cinemas where this movie was shown; the one-godly riposted by rushing to see imported, non-vegetarian Westerns in which cows got massacred and the good guys feasted on steaks. And mobs of irate film buffs attacked the cinemas of their enemies. . . .well, it was a time for all types of craziness, that's all.

Mahmoud the Woman lost his Empire because of a single error, which arose out of his fatal personality flaw, namely tolerance. "Time to rise above all this partition foolishness," he informed his mirror one morning, and that same day he booked a double bill into his Talkies: Randolph Scott and Gai-Wallah would succeed one another on his screen.

On the opening day of the double bill of his destruction the meaning of his nickname changed for ever. He had been named The Woman by the street urchins because, being a widower, he had been obliged to act as a mother to Bilquìs ever since his wife died when the girl was barely two. But now this affectionate title came to mean something more dangerous, and when children spoke of Mahmoud the Woman they meant Mahmoud the Weakling, the Shameful, the Fool. "Woman," he sighed resignedly to his daughter, "what a term! Is there no end to the burdens this word is capable of bearing? Was there ever such a broad-backed and also such a dirty word?"

How the double bill was settled: both sides, veg and non-veg, boycotted the Empire. For five, six, seven days films played to an empty house in which peeling plaster and slowly rotating ceiling fans and the intermission gram-vendors gazed down upon rows of undoubtedly rickety and equally certainly unoccupied seats; three-thirty, six-thirty and nine-thirty shows were all the same, not even the special Sunday-morning shows could tempt anyone through the swing doors. "Give it up," Bilquìs urged her father. "What do you want? You miss your wheelbarrow or what?"

But now an unfamiliar stubbornness entered Mahmoud the Woman, and he announced that the double bill would be held over for a Second Sensational Week. His own barrow-boys deserted him; nobody was willing to cry these ambiguous wares through the electric gullies; no voice dared announce, "Plans now open!" or "Don't wait or it's too late!"

Mahmoud and Bilquìs lived in a high thin house behind the Empire, "straight through the screen," as he said; and on that afternoon when the world ended and began again the emperor's daughter, who was alone with the servant at home, was suddenly choked by the certainty that her father had chosen, with the mad logic of his romanticism, to persist with his crazy scheme until it killed him. Terrified by a sound like the beating wings of an angel, a sound for which she could afterwards find no good explanation but which pounded in her ears until her head ached, she ran out of her house, pausing only to wrap around her shoulders the green dupatta of modesty; which was how she came to be standing, catching her breath, in front of the heavy doors of the cinema behind which her father sat grimly amidst vacant seats watching the show, when the hot firewind of apocalypse began to blow.

The walls of her father's Empire puffed outwards like a hot puri while that wind like the cough of a sick giant burned away her eyebrows (which never grew again), and tore the clothes off her body until she stood infant-naked in the street; but she failed to notice her nudity because the universe was ending, and in the echoing alienness of the deadly wind her burning eyes saw everything come flying out, seats, ticket books, fans, and then pieces of her father's shattered corpse and the charred shards of the future. "Suicide!" she cursed Mahmoud the Woman at the top of a voice made shrieky by the bomb. "You chose this!"—and turning and running homewards she saw that the back wall of the cinema had been blown away, and embedded in the topmost storey of her high thin house was the figure of a golden knight on whose pennant she did not need to read the comically unknown word *Excelsior*.

Don't ask who planted the bomb; in those days there were many such planters, many gardeners of violence. Perhaps it was even a one-godly bomb, seeded in the Empire by one of Mahmoud's more fanatical co-religionists, because it seems that the timer reached zero during a particularly suggestive love scene, and we know what the godly think of love, or the illusion of it, especially when admission money must be paid to see it. . . . they are Against. They cut it out. Love corrupts.

O Bilquìs. Naked and eyebrowless beneath the golden knight, wrapped in the delirium of the firewind, she saw her youth flying past her, borne away on the wings of the explosion which were still beating in her ears.

From "The World According to Hsü," Darkness, *by Bharati Mukherjee*

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Justin had promised them a two-hour trip but he had shown them the city in forty-five minutes. Too many things were closed, too many sections of town under guard. So they asked him to drive out into the country.

For miles the road was nothing more than an untidy gash, an aid-project miscalculation, on the side of an endless red hill. They feared the road might strand them among wet rice fields and blood-red adobes. Then, without warning, the flaccid gash acquired a scab of gray; it became an oddly formal *grande allée* wider than a runway, lined with jacaranda and light standards. The boulevard terminated at the iron gate of a wooden house with painted columns.

"*Et voilà,*" Justin announced. "*Le palais de roi.*"

"Where's the King?" Ratna asked.

"The French threw him out in 1767. He was seven feet tall and used to kill missionaries by biting their heads off—phfft."

"Where's that music coming from?" Graeme asked. Faint, almost familiar, it seemed to be coming from the royal grounds.

"Oh, that? It is a recital by the King's band."

"But you have no king."

"We still have his band. Only the best musicians are allowed to play."

"It is open to the public?"

"No, no," said Justin, throwing up his hands. "The public is not allowed. No photography is allowed."

"Then who the hell are they playing for? Are they practising for a special occasion?"

"Yes, they are rehearsing," said Justin.

"For a holiday?"

"No, no, the revolution outlawed all the old holidays. Now they give recitals here everyday."

"For themselves?" asked Ratna.

"Yes, yes, only for themselves. They rehearse for when the holidays come back and they give recitals everyday for themselves."

The Claytons walked up the shallow steps that led to the iron gate. Heavy chains and an ornamental lock were looped around its rusty trelliswork. It was hard to think of that entrance or of that wooden house as royal. There were no guards, not even the gaudy paratroopers in open-topped boots. The Claytons searched the wooden structure—the wood turned out to be just a facade for another large adobe box—for clues to its forgotten history, but all the plaques had been taken down. The walls showed no flags, no heraldic signs, not even the mysterious wounds of battle. Over to one side, under the shade of jacaranda trees, sat the King's band. Their uniforms were splendidly gallant, red satin with gold braid. It was a brass band; the bandmaster wore a yachting cap and a bright red tunic. His white beard was neatly trimmed. The band knew the piece well, whatever it was; this was a recital, not a practice. The notes meandered in the wintry twilight, refusing to coalesce into anything familiar. The music revealed no hurt, no quiet suffering—it was intended for pomp and public celebration, it was music of the plazas and reviewing stands. The moment held no pathos, only dust and gallantry. When the visitors had to leave because it was too perilously close to the curfew deadline, the man playing the tuba tipped his instrument in Ratna's direction.

From The Imam and the Indian, *by Amitav Ghosh*

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"All right *ya doktor*," he said to me as soon as I had seated myself. "Tell me, is it true what they say, that in your country you burn your dead?"

No sooner had he said it than the women of the group clasped their hands to their hearts and muttered in breathless horror: "*Haram*! *Haram*!"

My heart sank. This was a conversation I usually went through at least once a day and I was desperately tired of it. "Yes," I said, "it's true; some people in my country burn their dead."

"You mean," said Khamees in mock horror, "that you put them on heaps of wood and just light them up?"

"Yes," I said, hoping that he would tire of this sport if I humoured him.

"Why?" he said. "Is there a shortage of kindling in your country?"

"No," I said helplessly, "you don't understand." Somewhere in the limitless riches of the Arabic language a word such as "cremate" must exist, but if it does, I never succeeded in finding it. Instead, for lack of any other, I had to use the word "burn." That was unfortunate, for "burn" was the word for what happened to wood and straw and the eternally damned.

Khamees the Rat turned to his spellbound listeners. "I'll tell you why they do it," he said. "They do it so their bodies can't be punished after the Day of Judgement."

Everybody burst into wonderstruck laughter. "Why, how clever," cried one of the younger girls. "What a good idea! We ought to start doing it ourselves. That way we can do exactly what we like and when we die and the Day of Judgement comes, there'll be nothing there to judge."

Khamees had got his laugh. Now he gestured to them to be quiet again.

"All right then *ya doktor*," he said. "Tell me something else: is it true that you are a Magian? That in your country everybody worships cows? Is it true that the other day when you were walking through the fields you saw a man beating a cow and you were so upset that you burst into tears and ran back to your room?"

"No, it's not true," I said, but without much hope: I had heard this story before and knew that there was nothing I could say which would effectively give it the lie. "You're wrong. In my country people beat their cows all the time; I promise you."

I could see that no one believed me.

"Everything's upside-down in their country," said a dark aquiline young woman who, I was told later, was Khamees's wife. "Tell us *ya doktor*: in your country, do you have crops and fields and canals like we do?"

"Yes," I said, "we have crops and fields, but we don't always have canals. In some parts of my country they aren't needed because it rains all the year around."

"*Ya salàm*," she cried, striking her forehead with the heel of her palm. "Do you hear that, oh you people? Oh, the Protector, oh, the Lord! It rains all the year round in his country."

She had gone pale with amazement. "So tell us then," she demanded, "do you have night and day like we do?"

"Shut up woman," said Khamees. "Of course they don't. It's day all the time over there, didn't you know? They arranged it like that so that they wouldn't have to spend any money on lamps."

We all laughed, and then someone pointed to a baby lying in the shade of a tree swaddled in a sheet of cloth. "That's Khamees's baby," I was told. "He was born last month."

"That's wonderful," I said. "Khamees must be very happy."

Khamees gave a cry of delight. "The Indian knows I'm happy because I've had a son," he said to the others. "He understands that people are happy when they have children: he's not as upside-down as we thought."

He slapped me on the knee and lit up the hookah and from that moment we were friends.

One evening, perhaps a month or so after I first met Khamees, he and his brothers and I were walking back to the village from the fields when he spotted the old Imam sitting on the steps that led to the mosque.

"Listen," he said to me, "you know the old Imam, don't you? I saw you talking to him once."

"Yes," I said. "I talked to him once."

"My wife's ill," Khamees said. "I want the Imam to come to my house to give her an injection. He won't come if I ask him, he doesn't like me. You go and ask."

"He doesn't like me either," I said.

"Never mind," Khamees insisted. "he'll come if you ask him—he knows you're a foreigner. He'll listen to you."

While Kamees waited on the edge of the square with his brothers I went across to the Imam. I could tell that he had seen me—and Khamees—from a long way off, that he knew I was crossing the square to talk to him. But he would not look in my direction. Instead, he pretended to be deep in conversation with a man who was sitting beside him, an elderly and pious shopkeeper whom I knew slightly.

When I reached them I said "Good evening" very pointedly to the Imam. He could not ignore me any longer then, but his response was short and curt, and he turned back at once to resume his conversation.

The old shopkeeper was embarrassed now, for he was a courteous, gracious man in the way that seemed to come so naturally to the elders of the village. "Please sit down," he said to me. "Do sit. Shall we get you a chair?"

Then he turned to the Imam and said, slightly puzzled: "You know the Indian *doktor*, don't you? He's come all the way from India to be a student at the University of Alexandria."

"I know him," said the Imam. "He came around to ask me questions. But as for this student business, I don't know. What's *he* going to study? He doesn't even write in Arabic."

"Well," said the shopkeeper judiciously, "that's true; but after all he writes his own languages and he knows English."

"Oh those," said the Imam. "What's the use of *those* languages? They're the easiest languages in the world. Anyone can write those."

He turned to face me for the first time. His eyes were very bright and his mouth was twitching with anger. "Tell me," he said, "why do you worship the cows?"

I was so taken aback that I began to stammer. The Imam ignored me. He turned to the old shopkeeper and said: "That's what they do in his country—did you know?—they worship cows."

He shot me a glance from the corner of his eyes. "And shall I tell you what else they do?" he said to the shopkeeper.

He let the question hang for a moment. And then, very loudly, he hissed: "They burn their dead."

The shopkeeper recoiled as though he had been slapped. His hands flew to his mouth. "Oh God!" he muttered. "*Ya Allah.*"

"That's what they do," said the Imam. "They burn their dead."

Then suddenly he turned to me and said, very rapidly: "Why do you allow it? Can't you see that it's a primitive and backward custom? Are you savages that you permit something like that? Look at you: you've had some kind of education; you should know better. How will your country ever progress if you carry on doing these things? You've even been to the West; you've seen how advanced they are. Now tell me: have you ever seen them burning their dead?"

The Imam was shouting now and a circle of young men and boys had gathered around us. Under the pressure of their interested eyes, my tongue began to trip, even on syllables I thought I had mastered. I found myself growing angry—as much with my own incompetence as the Imam.

"Yes, they do burn their dead in the West," I managed to say somehow. I raised my voice too now. "They have special electric furnaces meant just for that."

The Imam could see that he had stung me. He turned away and laughed. "He's lying," he said to the crowd. "They don't burn their dead in the West. They're not an ignorant people. They're advanced, they're educated, they have science, they have guns and tanks and bombs."

"We have them too!" I shouted back at him. I was as confused now as I was angry. "In my country we have all those things too." I said to the crowd, "We have guns and tanks and bombs. And they're better than anything you have—we're way ahead of you."

The Imam could no longer disguise his anger. "I tell you, he's lying," he said. "Our guns and bombs are much better than theirs. Ours are second only to the West's."

"It's you who's lying," I said. "You know nothing about this. Ours are much better. Why, in my country we've even had a nuclear explosion. You won't be able to match that in a hundred years."

So there we were, the Imam and I, delegates from two superseded civilizations vying with each other to lay claim to the violence of the West.

From The Trotter-Nama, *by I. Allan Sealy*

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So I went back to Albert's place—same place, other side—and said, Listen, I've got a special dinner for Sunday night, just for coming home and all. Learnt how to cook while I was there—you got to. Brought most of the stuff with me but we can borrow one or two things from them. Pointing to the five-star buggers in *Sungum*. Glacerie's still ours, no?

So, Sunday night in the Glacerie at the big table. A few Trotters from close by sitting there. Some Alexander-Trotters (not the rich ones—they all in fancy houses now), couple of Kahn-Trotters, Ian Atkins-Trotter, still running the ice factory alone, still wearing his thin-thin rubber slippers, couple of teacher nieces of his and a smart young Fonseca-Trotter. Looking at me damn strangely, all of them. So I handed out the menus that I had made up, and they started to read. One of Albert's little ones saying, Ugh! chickens *en lezards*. So I said: Mesdames et masseurs—you know, putting on a bit of kanni—first we have a gazpacho to which I have taken the liberty of adding crotons. One of the teachers, nice-looking girl, said: Sippits, men, what crotons-fotons. And when she tasted it: *Cold* soup! The other teacher said: It's *meant* to be cold, and tilted her plate nicely away from her. Then everyone complaining, Not enough salt in the fish. Where are the chips? No ketchup? Soma eating the sweetbreads in walnut sauce with her fingers. When I tried to take away the dessert-spoons and keep them for the dessert Albert gave me a hell of a look. Anyway after the *flan au miel*—sweet as hell—I brought out the cheeses. And old Kahn-Trotter said, Why you didn't serve them first with the salty things, men? I said: All right, you wait till you try this, and I opened the wine. Second teacher said: Mm, bouquet! Ian says, Not enough fizz, and takes out an orange drink. Still had a couple of crates left. He was sorry he did, because everyone started saying—except for the second teacher—Yes, yes, give us one, Ian. Little ones mixing the wine with the orange. So afterwards when I put on a record—we went across to the Spur—they ask what the hell is this? No Bocherinni-Focherinni. What's this? Haydn—where's he hidin'? And the first teacher went and got a Boney M and started dancing with the smart Fonseca-Trotter. Albert takes me out and says, Come off it, Eugene. You grew up sucking chusni mangoes, men. So I say OK. What the hell.

From House of a Thousand Doors, *by Meena Alexander*

From Meena Alexander, *House of a Thousand Doors* (Washington, D.C: Three Continents Press, 1988), 101–102.

The tales we tell in the middle of our lives cannot disclose the secret rose or magic bird our souls cry out for. We press our noses to the glass and watch the mechanical emperor, his pointed shoes and shining eyeglasses. He turns on his heels, in the sunlight, as the clock strikes.

The children who enter the museum know him well. But when they see the great clock strike and the emperor turn on his heels, they press their noses to the glass and cry out for the mystic bird. "It will cost three paise more," says the guard, but the child tugging at the woman's hand does not hear.

The small foot slips. She plunges down the glass staircase, into the secret garden. As her head strikes the stone at the bottom, she cries out in pain. For the bird sings in her veins and the rose, hidden in her brain, unveils itself.

The emperor's palace is now a museum. Where the brass clock with the mechanical figure stands, was once a room full of birds. The emperor loved his room of birds. On moonlit nights, he would tiptoe up, fling open the doors and enter; his cloak streaming behind him, his jade coloured nails, stiff, pointed, almost like wings.

Tucking his cloak into his waist band, so as not to trip over it, he would peer into each and every bird cage, then flick his nails over the paper roses that stood by the walls. The stalks were painted with a mixture of tumeric and antimony, a cunning powder that kept the red ants away.

The room of birds was lit with two huge paper lamps. One was an orange lantern with red rice patterns on it. It gave off a burning glow, rather like the sun. The other, made of white crepe paper, was covered over with a film of mother of pearl. It was curved, with a point at each end, rather like the crescent moon. Both lamps were lit, day and night, on the orders of the emperor. He was determined that the birds, who had never seen the sky since the day of their captivity, should lack nothing.

The birds know the emperor's step. Hearing him, they gnashed beaks against bars, tore their wings against the iron locks. Cried out, in the bronze light. The cry of the birds rose as a great wind, whirled about the make-believe sun and moon, threatening to unfix them. It entered the emperor's ears, clung to the inside of his pointed nose and beat about his sallow cheeks. It stripped off the ivory powder under his mustache that the valet had brushed on to hide a blemish.

The emperor's hands trembled. His jade coloured nails threatened to take flight. In his excitement, he wept like a woman, knowing he could not live without this music, so secret, so forbidden.

If you come in through the main gate, go past the guard and turn right. Ahead of you is the courtyard with the great clock. Turn right again, past the lavatory and enter the first door to your left. That's it. The room where all the ceremonial clothes are stored. Even a few of his underclothes. Gigantic sleeves of mulsin stitched to woollen undershirts, silken crotches stuck to brocade stockings that are worn under cloak and gowns.

You will see many jewelled turbans; sherwanis that countless tailors have burnt their fingers stitching. The gold thread was passed through fire before it turned soft enough to be fashioned into the pin stripes the emperor favoured on his sherwanis.

Then there is the cloak with the emblem of the royal boar. It was made for the emperor's coronation. It is said that fifteen virgins lost their sight, labouring day and night to complete it. Each midnight they descended, burning torches in their hands, small knives tucked into their petticoats. They shaved off tiny slivers of ivory, none larger than a millimetre in width. In the morning they wove the ivory into the cloak. The elephant, which had been killed by the emperor's great uncle, was stored in the cellar for this very purpose, tusk and tail intact.

The cellar, in case you are wondering, has been turned into a cafeteria. The curator of the museum has brought in stuffed seals from Norway. One of the seals stands behind the ice cream counter with a red ball balanced on its nose. This amuses the children.

An Interview with R. K. Narayan

STEPHEN R. GRAUBARD: What can one say, in brief compass, about Indian literature? How do you see it?

R. K. NARAYAN: This is a vast field—Indian literature—ancient, modern. There are so many languages in India. To know the literature of each is very difficult, and yet there are few translations from one language into another. It is difficult to judge the literature of so many languages. I can judge only Tamil; I cannot read literature in Kannada but I understand it, and English, of course. About literature in the other languages I would not be able to tell you very much. Yet there is so much literature and literary criticism in each of these languages.

GRAUBARD: Yes, that is true. What is read by one group may not be read by others. But what about Indian English literature—writers like Anita Desai, who is writing a short essay for us, Mulk Raj Anand, and Vikram Seth?

NARAYAN: Anita Desai and Vikram Seth are good writers. I very much enjoyed reading *The Golden Gate Bridge*. In fact, I reviewed it.

GRAUBARD: What about poetry in English?

NARAYAN: I don't read modern poetry. I confine myself to old English poetry. And to T. S. Eliot.

GRAUBARD: But looking at Indian writing in English, is it very innovative?

NARAYAN: It is difficult to make a judgment. Publishers bring out all kinds of things in English. I get books from publishers, particularly American publishers, asking for my opinion. But most of the stuff is inferior. What do you feel about the situation?

R. K. Narayan is an award-winning novelist and essayist.

GRAUBARD: Since there appears to be a market abroad for Indian writing in English, the publishers are stepping in. There is a lot of interest in Indian writing.

NARAYAN: I don't know about other forms, but in fiction, I think, there is a lack of judgment. I base this impression entirely on what the publishers send me.

GRAUBARD: Is the treatment of books meant for the Indian market different from those intended for a foreign market?

NARAYAN: I don't know; I don't think about it.

GRAUBARD: Is it possible to generalize about Indian life or about Indians?

NARAYAN: I know only about my part of the country, a little; and, of course, Mysore. I don't know rural Mysore. I don't like villages. I don't even know the whole of Karnataka, though I have visited all parts of the state. I have written about Karnataka, but not as fiction. My fiction is set in my own background, though Malgudi is imaginary. Malgudi is fixed in the 1930s, and that gives me extraordinary freedom. I can even put a lighthouse there if I want to, though there is no coast near Malgudi.

GRAUBARD: Do you read reviews of your books? To what extent are you affected by criticism?

NARAYAN: Earlier, I never read reviews of my books because I did not want to become self-conscious. Now, I may occasionally read them, but they do not bother me. Critics say that I don't talk of the aspirations of the people, of the political agony that we have gone through, and of all those plans for economic growth. I am not interested in that. I am interested in human characters and their background. That is important for me; I want a story to be entertaining, enjoyable, and illuminating in some way.

GRAUBARD: I visited the towns of Belur and Halebedu yesterday and found them absolutely fascinating.

NARAYAN: Yes. You must have noted that much of Indian art is anonymous. Perhaps that is how it should be. I like a work of art that has a life of its own independent of its creator. When I write, I write for myself. While writing, I don't think of readers' reactions. A book, a piece of writing, even a paragraph, has an organic life of its own, and people are free to view it in any manner they like. I would like to be free of responsibility for my fictional characters.

GRAUBARD: I am interested to know that you rarely read criticism, that you are not much moved, even by harsh criticism.

NARAYAN: As I said, I do not read criticism because I do not want to be self-conscious. Perhaps the whole basis of life is to be oneself and not to be self-conscious. When I am writing, I don't read much because I do not wish to be influenced. When I write, I don't know what is coming next. But it grows as I write, and when I read it at night, I am sometimes surprised by what I have written in the afternoon.

GRAUBARD: You really don't know the details when you sit down to write?

NARAYAN: I have a general idea of what I want to write, but the details come only when the writing is in progress. They well up from some depth within me.

GRAUBARD: Do you also read nonfiction?

NARAYAN: Yes. Biography, science subjects, travelogues, and things like that.

GRAUBARD: I would like to talk about another aspect of contemporary India. Many Indians grow up in one part of the country and then move elsewhere. Indians are peripatetic. Even within the country large numbers are on the move all the time. Is this reflected in your life, your thinking, your writing?

NARAYAN: I do not think so, though I do travel a lot. I go to Europe for pleasure, but also to work, to see my publishers. They are only excuses for visiting New York or London.

GRAUBARD: So you go to Europe or America to work and enjoy yourself. But does the time you spend in New York or elsewhere not become part of your imaginative life? The reason I ask this is that I wonder whether Indians can move to the West and yet retain their Indianness.

NARAYAN: They can live anywhere because they create their own surroundings. They do not complain, however difficult it may be. But they create their own environment; they spend most of their time with their relatives or countrymen. On a Saturday or Sunday they may travel fifty miles to meet other Indians and have *Idli* or *Dosai.* They create a little India wherever they go. A small number go outside their own community and get to know others. But, then, in New York you have Americans living on West 23rd Street who do not know what life is like on West 25th Street. I used to go to a store on 23rd Street to buy my provisions; the storekeeper had never gone beyond 23rd Street. Every time he met me he said, "It must be fun going through Times Square at night. Someday I'll do it."

GRAUBARD: Is the difference between Westernized, modern India and traditional India a real difference for you?

NARAYAN: Traditional India is very strong. Modern India is very dynamic; the people are different; they are more Westernized. Again, life in the home may be different from life outside. One can be traditional at home and modern outside.

GRAUBARD: Do you yourself put a great deal of emphasis on the differences between traditional India and modern India? What do you feel?

NARAYAN: Probably you can find it in my stories. Their background does not change. The society in my stories remains static. That makes it more convenient to tackle. When you go to Bombay, you find it is different from Delhi or Calcutta. It is impossible to talk about an urban India, and even more so, a rural India. I cannot stay in a village. I like to watch villages while I am passing by in a car or train, but I would not like to live there. I cannot write about Bombay. It is a different society.

GRAUBARD: What about Calcutta?

NARAYAN: I was in Calcutta for a while some years ago. I liked it. Calcutta is an interesting city. There are some impressive old buildings. Calcutta has a great deal, but of all the cities I like Madras.

GRAUBARD: Apart from the fact that you like New York, London, and Paris, why do you like Madras?

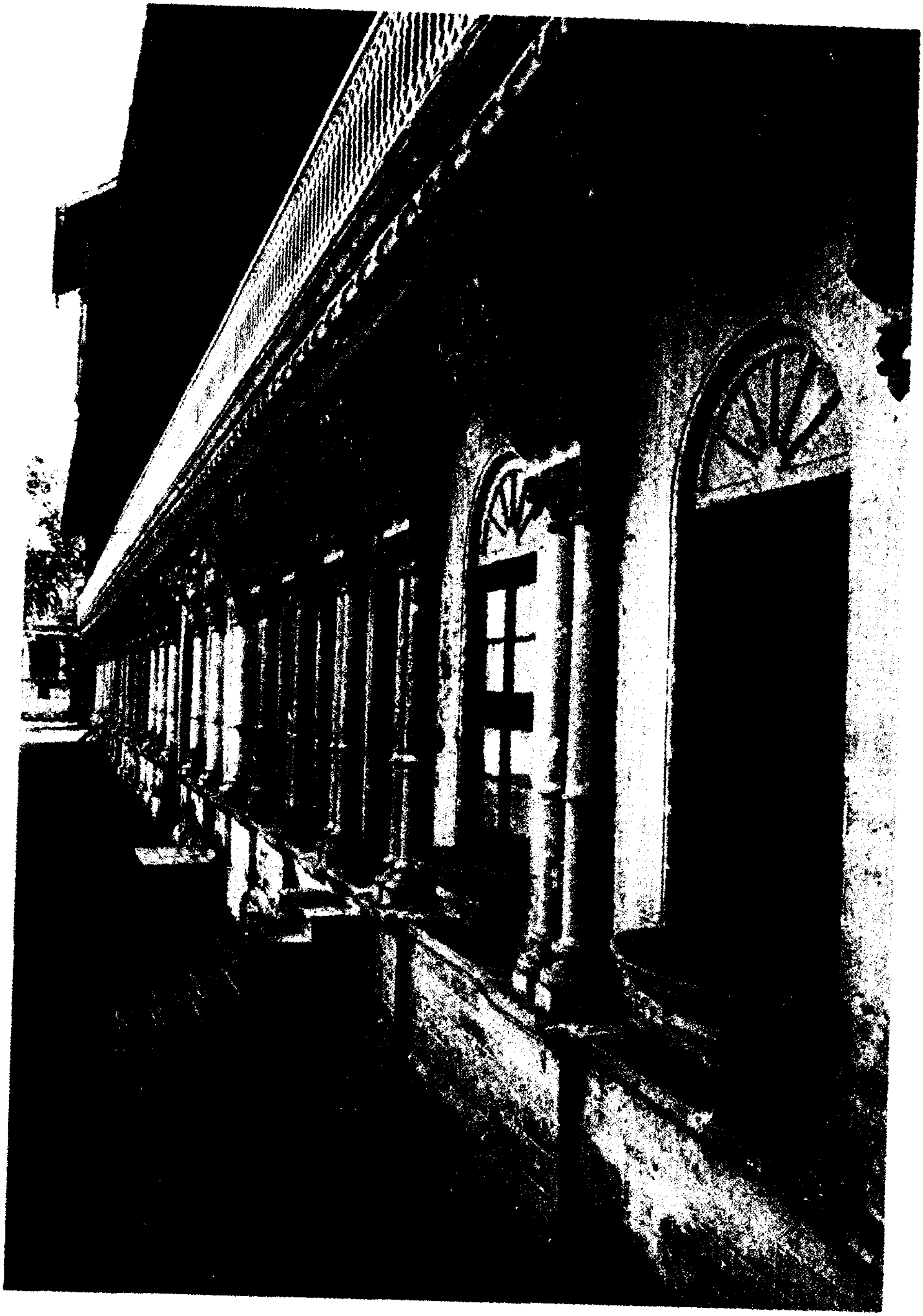
NARAYAN: I like Madras because I was born there and because in Madras the ancient and the modern coexist. Madras is both old and new, and you can find lots of things there—drama, theatres, lectures, religious discourses, musical concerts. Some Madrasis are very orthodox. There are parts of the city where people with a traditional background in Sanskrit are still living. I like talking about Madras much better than talking about India.

GRAUBARD: What book are you writing now?

NARAYAN: It is a novel, *The World of Nagaraj*. It is being serialized in *Frontline*, published by the Hindu newspaper group. The novel is in progress; some eighteen installments have come out.

GRAUBARD: What is your day like?

NARAYAN: I get up at the stroke of eight. I wake at four or five, but I do not care to get up before eight. I would like to sleep till nine, if possible. I have breakfast at eight-thirty and then some *pooja*, some prayer and meditation for an hour. I write from three-thirty to about five-thirty in the afternoon. At night, before I go to bed, I read what I have written during the day and make corrections, which is a much longer and more tedious process. The days when I could write continuously for long periods are over.



Telling Tales

A. K. Ramanujan

Even in the most urbane and Westernized Indian households there exists, behind the prim exterior, another India. It lives in tales of passion and trouble, told to children by their grandmothers and servants as the dusk descends. Related in languages from Tamil to Kannada, the stories turn the diurnal hierarchy on its head: their heroes are beggars who are really gods and princesses forced to labor as servants. Consciousness gives way; the unconscious surfaces. The disciplines of the father tongues—the classical Sanskrit, the official and universal English—are imposed later in childhood, but the Indian psyche is first swathed in the mother languages' secret folds.

As Indian voices are a central concern of this *Dædalus* issue, I've chosen to speak of certain childhood voices—in tales heard from our grandmothers, aunts, and cooks in the kitchen—and about how I hear them now. Since my childhood, I have done what may be called fieldwork among other people's grandmothers and other domestic tellers of tales in Kannada villages and towns. Indeed, many of the tales I shall relate here are samples from my collections, and from those of my fellow folklorists, made over the last two decades in Karnataka and Tamilnadu. So I hope you will hear two voices—mine and enclosed in it the voices of domestic tellers of tales, mostly

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women's (in my translation). One can say a great deal about these tales, but I have written about them elsewhere and my space here is limited. I shall therefore present some tales and suggest what sorts of things they may represent to someone like me who, like many other Indians, is blessed and handicapped by at least three language traditions—Sanskrit, a mother tongue, and English.

When I say "childhood voices," I refer not only to my own childhood but also to that of myriad others like me and also to children today in Indian villages. The tales I am talking about are ancient but current. Even in the most anglicized Hindu families or in large cities like Bombay and Calcutta, oral tales are only a grandmother away, a cousin away, a train ride away, and mostly no further away than the kitchen. I hear that the nets of television will soon cover 90 percent of the Indian population: I don't know if that will kill the folk narratives or adapt them or help disseminate them further. We will bracket that anxiety for now.

TALES IN CHILDHOOD

The only fairy tales we *read* in our early years were Grimm's and Andersen's, in English (as soon as we knew how to read it), among other things in a many-volume encyclopedia called *The Book of Knowledge* that was in our father's library. We never told these stories to one another. We never connected these tales with the ones we heard downstairs from our grandmother or our cooks in the kitchen.

The stories we heard downstairs were in Tamil (or in friends' houses, in Kannada); they were oral, told by a grandmother, an aunt, or a cook, never by Mother. Authority figures did not tell these stories, at least not in our family.[1] My mother told me folktales only when she had lost her authority over me, when I was in my twenties and I was interested in learning about them. Furthermore, there were taboos against telling them during the broad daylight. They were told at dusk while we were eating, for South Indian stories tend to be mealtime rather than bedtime stories. Associated with relaxed loving figures, with sleep and food, the tales were formative influences and hypnotic. We were trying hard to keep our eyes open by the time we came to the end of the story and the meal, which were timed to coincide. The prince was married, the slandered bride reinstated, and the wicked stepmother thrown into the lime kiln, just when the morsel in the sleepy hand was the very last one. The tales in the English books had names like Cinderella, Snow White, Hansel and Gretel, but grandmother's had no names at all. The characters were people like a poor Brahmin and his scold of a wife, or two sisters, one kind and one unkind, who were daughters born to a dog that lived under the palace balcony, or clever daughters-in-law who terrorized even the goddess with their farts or outwitted their cruel but stupid mothers-in-law. Our grandmothers, who had been both, always seemed to identify with the clever daughters-in-law.

Our very literate father never told us stories like these, though he too knew them and had heard them in his childhood. But if he talked to us at all, he talked about astronomy, astrology, Euclid, often the Sanskrit Bhagavad Gita or poetry, or Chaucer and Shakespeare and Tolstoy and Dumas, or anything he happened to be reading. My father once told the whole story of *Macbeth* to my mother in the kitchen, in Tamil, with all of us listening in. It was a rare occasion and we knew it. As we grew up, Sanskrit and English were our father tongues, and Tamil and Kannada our mother tongues. The father tongues distanced us from our mothers, from our own childhoods, and from our villages and many of our neighbors in the cowherd colony next door. And the mother tongues united us with them. It now seems quite appropriate that our house had three levels: a downstairs for the Tamil world, an upstairs for the English and the Sanskrit, and a terrace on top that was open to the sky where our father could show us the stars and tell us their English and Sanskrit names. From up there on the terrace, we could also look down on the cowherd colony, and run down noisily and breathlessly for a closer look if we saw the beginnings of a festival, a wedding, or a "hair to hair" fight between two women (with the choicest obscenities pouring from them), or a magnificent *vilayti*, or foreign bull, brought specially to service the local cows.

We ran up and down all these levels. Sanskrit, English, and Tamil and Kannada (my two childhood languages, literally my mother's tongues, since she too had become bilingual in our childhood) stood for three different interconnected worlds. Sanskrit stood for the Indian past; English for colonial India and the West, which also served as a disruptive creative other that both alienated us from and revealed us (in its terms) to ourselves; and the mother tongues, the most comfortable and least conscious of all, for the world of women, playmates, children, and servants. Ideas, tales, significant alliances, conflicts, elders, and peers were reflected in each of these languages. Each had a literature that was unlike the others'. Each was an other to the others, and it became the business of a lifetime for some of us to keep the dialogues and quarrels alive among these three and to make something of them. Our writers, thinkers, and men of action —say, Gandhi, Tagore, and Bharati—made creative use of these triangulations, these dialogues and quarrels. For those of us who were shaped in that "triple stream," our translations, poems, lives in and out of India, searches (which we often disguised as research, analysis, even psychoanalysis), and all such explorations, including essays such as these, are witnesses to this lifelong enterprise. Though I shall use the first person singular often in this essay, I believe that neither the things I am talking about nor most of the recognitions are peculiarly mine.

WOMEN'S ORAL TALES

What follows is an oral tale—"The Dead Prince and the Talking Doll"—a typical favorite:

The king had a daughter. One daughter, but no sons. Now and then a beggar would come to the palace. He was strange, for every time he begged, he would say, "You'll get a dead man for a husband. Give me some alms." The girl used to wonder: "Why does he say such weird things to me?" And she would silently give him alms and go in. The holy man (*bava*), this beggar man, came to the door every day for twelve years. And he said every day, "You'll get a dead man for a husband."

One day the king was standing in the balcony and heard him say, "You'll get a dead man for a husband. Give me some alms." The king came down and asked his daughter, "What's this talk, daughter?"

She replied, "This bava comes every day and says, 'You'll get a dead man for a husband. Give me some alms.' Then I give him something. He has been saying it for twelve years, ever since I was a little girl."

The king was disturbed when he heard this. He was afraid the prophecy would come true. He didn't wish his only daughter to have a dead man for a husband. He said, unhappily, "It's no good staying in this kingdom. Let's leave and spend our time in travels." And he got his servants to pack everything, and left the palace with his entire family.

Around that time, the prince of the neighboring kingdom fell mysteriously ill and died. But his body looked as if he had only fallen asleep. Astrologers said he would return to life after twelve years, so they didn't bury him. Instead, his father, the king, built a bungalow outside the town, laid his son's body in it, mortared and whitewashed the house on all sides, and left the body there, fully clothed and adorned. The father locked the main door and on it left a written message saying: "One day a chaste woman who has made offerings to the gods for her husband will come here. Only she can enter the place. When she touches the door, it will open. It will open to no one else."

It was soon after this sad event that the first king arrived there with his wife and daughter and his entourage. They were all hungry and began to cook a meal for themselves. The king's daughter went for a walk and saw the locked door. The lock was of exquisite design and gleamed from a distance.

She went near and held it in her hand. As soon as she touched it, it sprang open and the door opened. She went in. The door closed and locked itself behind her. Ahead of her were eleven more doors, one behind another. They all opened at her touch, and each closed behind her as she went through them.

Right in the heart of the house she found a man on a cot who looked as if he were dead or fast asleep. Before she could wonder about what was happening to her, how doors opened before her and shut behind her, she was in his presence.

His family had left provisions for twelve years in the house: vessels, dishes, clothes, grains, spices. The princess saw all these things around her.

She remembered the holy beggar's words and thought, "I didn't escape it: his words are coming true." She unveiled the face of the body. It was as dead as dead could be but as calm as a face in deep slumber. "Well, what's to be done? It looks as if I am imprisoned here with this dead man. Let's do something," she said, and started massaging his legs.

Meanwhile, in the forest, the mother had said, "The food is all ready. Where's our girl?" Her father had walked outside and called her. She was nowhere to be seen. But they could hear her cries from inside the house. They called out, "Daughter, why are you in there? Come out!"

She answered from within and told her father what had happened.

"I touched the locks, and they fell open. As soon as I came in, they locked themselves shut. I am alone here."

"What is in there?"

"A dead man is lying here. Nothing else."

"My girl, your luck has caught up with you. What the bava said is coming true. The locks can't be opened."

They tried to enter the house from the sides and from behind, but it was as if it was sealed. They tried and tried and finally said, "What else can we do? We'll go and leave you to work out your fate." They left sorrowfully. Time passed, and they grew old.

For almost twelve years she tended and massaged his body. She would wake up in the morning in the locked house with twelve locked doors, and where could she go? She bathed and cooked, kept house and looked after the dead body, and thought about all the things that had happened to her.

Inside the locked house, night and day the princess massaged the dead man's legs, took ritual baths, worshipped the gods at the right times, and made offerings for her prince. Around the tenth year, an acrobat's daughter came that way. She looked all around the house, tried the doors, and at last climbed onto the roof.

The princess was lonely. She was dying to see another human face. "If there's a chink in the house, I could pull in at least a child. If only I could have a girl for a companion," she thought. Just then, she saw a young woman looking through a window.

"Hey, girl! Will you come inside?"

"Yes," said the acrobat girl.

"Do you have any father or mother? If you do, don't try to come in. You can't get out. If you don't have parents, come inside."

"Oh no, I've nobody."

She pulled the girl in through the window. The acrobat girl was agile. She twisted and contorted her body and got in. The princess was happy; she had company now. With a companion inside, time went fast. Two more years rolled by.

The prince's twelve years were coming to an end. The time for his life to stir again was near.

One day, when the king's daughter was taking her bath, she heard the omen bird speak from the branch in the window. It said, "The twelve years are coming to an end. If someone will pluck the leaves of this tree, grind them and press them in a silver cup, and pour the juice into the man's mouth, he will come to life again."

The king's daughter heard it. At once she plucked some leaves, pressed the juice out into a silver cup. Just when she was about to put it to the dead man's lips, it occurred to her that she had not bathed yet. She would finish her bath, purify herself, offer worship to the Lord Shiva properly, and then give the juice to the prince. So she put down the cup and went to bathe and offer worship.

The acrobat girl asked her, "What's this stuff in the cup? Why is it here?"

The princess told her about the bird's message and what the cup contained. As soon as she heard all this, the acrobat girl thought this was her chance. While the princess sat in worship, the acrobat girl parted the dead prince's lips and poured the juice from the silver cup. As the liquid went in, he woke up as if he had only been asleep. Exclaiming, "Shiva, Shiva!" he sat up straight. He saw the woman next to him and asked, "Who are you?"

She said, "Your wife."

He was grateful to her. They became husband and wife while the princess, the woman who had served him for twelve long years, sat inside, long absorbed in prayer.

When she came out, she heard the two of them whispering intimacies to each other and thought, "O Shiva, I did penance for twelve years, and it turned out like this. Obviously, happiness is not my lot." She began to work as their servant, while the prince and the acrobat girl sat back and enjoyed themselves.

Yet, after all, she was a princess, born to a queen. The other girl was only an acrobat's daughter. The prince began to see the difference between them in manners and speech. He began to suspect something was wrong. So later that day, he said to both of them, "I'm going out for a hunt, and then I'll go to the city. Tell me what you would like."

The acrobat girl, who had been longing for her kind of gypsy food, asked for all sorts of greens and some dry flat bread. He was disgusted. A woman should ask for saris and silk and blouses, but this one asks for wretched dry bread! Then he told the acrobat girl to ask the other woman in the house what she would like. The princess answered, "I don't want anything much. Just tell the master what I'd really like is a talking doll."

"This one is strange too. All she wants is a talking doll," he thought.

After a good hunt in the jungle, he brought the acrobat girl the evil-smelling greens and leaves and dry bread from some gypsies, and for the princess a talking doll. The acrobat girl was overjoyed at the sight of the rough food; now she began to thrive and get color in her cheeks.

That night, after everyone had eaten and gone to bed, the talking doll suddenly began to speak and said, "Tell me a story."

The princess answered, "What story can I tell you? My own life has become quite a story."

"Then tell me your life's story," insisted the doll.

So the princess told the doll her entire story, as I've told you so far. Just like that.

The doll nodded and said, "Hmm, hmm," as the princess told her tale. The prince, lying awake in the other room, heard it all. Finally she said, "I left the silver cup there, on that ledge, and that woman gave the juice to the prince before I got back from my prayers. Now she's the wife and I'm the servant. That's the way it turned out." And she ended the story.

As he heard the story from where he lay in the next room, the prince felt his anger mounting. When the story came to an end, he took a switch and lashed at the acrobat girl sleeping next to him, and drove her out of the house.

"You're not my wife, you're an acrobat wench! Get out of my sight!" he screamed.

Then he went in and consoled the princess who had served him lovingly for twelve years; and they talked to each other all night happily.

In the world outside, his father and mother had counted up the days and years. They knew twelve years were over and were anxious to see what had happened to their son. They came, and all the town with them. They found the doors unlocked and in the heart of the house the couple, prince and princess, whispering loving words to each other.

Gratefully, the father-in-law and the mother-in-law fell at the feet of their young daughter-in-law and said, "By your good work of many past lives and your prayers in this one, our son came back to life. He looks as fresh as if he has just woken up from a long night's sleep. It's all your doing."

They took the young couple to their palace, and celebrated the wedding with great pomp and many processions. For the grand occasion, they sent for the bride's parents, who had grown weak and old. Their eyes had become like cottonseed, and they were ready to lie down in the earth. But their spirits revived at the good news, and they too hurried to the reunion at their daughter's wedding.

That is what I would call a woman-centered tale. Such tales share special characteristics. While tales that feature princes who go off on quests for the golden bird in the emerald tree invariably end in wedding bells, tales with women at the center of action almost never do so. The women meet their husbands and are married formally or informally in the first part of the tale, often at the very beginning, and then the real story, usually nothing but trouble, begins. In this matter, they are unlike European tales of the Cinderella or Snow White type, which always conclude the action with marriage.

A characteristic pattern of the Kannada women-centered tales begins with a first union, often a marriage, followed by a separation, and ends with a reunion, a firmer bonding between the woman and her spouse. In several of these tales, the middle part features the death of the husband, separation of the most drastic kind, as in this one (and in the classical tale of Savitri), and in the latter part of the tale the wife restores him to life. In the story of the dead prince, the separation reaches its worst phase, the maiden's twelve years of waiting and suffering, when the acrobat woman suddenly usurps her place and becomes her husband's lover. Among other things, it expresses, I think, an upper-class woman's fear, the rivalry of a supposedly more vigorous, cunning lower-class woman.

For the prince on his quest, a kingdom and a bride are the prizes he wins after his adventures and hardships—that's his initiatory scenario. But in the women-centered tales, as in the classical analogues of *Sakuntala* and *Savitri*, it doesn't seem enough for a woman to be married. She has to earn her husband, her married state, through a rite of passage, a period of unmerited suffering.

In all such stories, there is no *karma*, no act of good or evil in a past life that motivates the present and rationalizes misfortunes, as there is in the epics. Though karma may be mentioned in passing, the concept is not part of this worldview. Actually, no reason is given for the wife's misfortunes or for the prince's twelve-year period of deathlike hibernation. Sometimes it is a curse or a prophecy, entirely unearned, unconnected to character. In a classical text like the Mahabharata, every action is motivated by the actor's previous actions. The chain of cause and consequence is unrelenting.

Not that our storytellers did not know about karma. Whenever Mother was angry with one of us, she (and all her fellow mothers, and all their mothers) scolded us with phrases like "You are my karma, my *prarabdha* (accumulated bad deeds), come now to torment me in this life." Such terms of abuse as well as the Sanskrit epics were full of the concept of karma and its consequences. One had to be careful to do good deeds and accumulate *punya*, or merit, and avoid bad ones, which would heap up *papa*, or sin (for want of a better word), with evil consequences in our divine accounts. We also believed when we were children that if anybody was thirsty and needed water, we shouldn't refuse it. If we did, we would surely be born as lizards in the next birth. But in the stories grandmother told us, there was rarely any mention of karma or rebirth. They usually felt confined to a single life span and seemed to work on a theory of action rather different from karma.

Donald Davidson and other philosophers speak of the difference between actions and events.[2] I find the distinction useful here. Actions have actors; actions express actors. Actions have reasons;

actors are responsible for what they do, and character is destiny. But events happen *to* people. Events have no reasons, only causes.

Narratives motivated by karma convert all events into actions; in them everything has a reason, as in the Mahabharata. But there is much in human reality that is not controlled by human beings—accident, social and economic institutions, nature itself, especially nature in its most intimate human form, one's own and others' bodies. The uncontrollable part of nature cannot be rationalized, especially in the moment of crisis. It can only be accepted or watched, laughed at or sidestepped and bypassed by human ingenuity. In these oral tales, this reality is not reasoned away but faced. Here actions, human actions, are seen as events. They have causes, no reasons. By enduring them and watching for a moment of change that is the apt moment for action, and acting then, usually speaking out, telling one's own story, one comes through. That's why many of these tales end with the heroine telling her own story to "a significant other" (often through a device, like a talking doll or a lamp), resolving the crisis, ending her separation, reuniting with her husband and her kin. The tale then becomes her story. Till then she has no story to tell. The whole tale is the tale of her acquiring her story, making a person of her, making a silent woman a speaking person.

STORIES ABOUT STORIES

The power of such tales may be why it is crucial that stories should be told and why there are stories about not telling stories and about why they should be told.

Here is one such story about stories:

A poor widow was living with her two sons and two daughters-in-law. All four of them scolded and ill treated her all day. She had no one to whom she could turn and tell her woes. As she kept her tales of woe to herself, she grew fatter and fatter. Her sons and daughters-in-law mocked at her growing fatter by the day and asked her to eat less.

One day, she wandered away from home in sheer misery and found herself in a deserted old house outside town. She couldn't bear to keep her miseries to herself any longer. She told all her tales of grievance against her first son to the wall in front of her. As she finished, the wall collapsed under the weight of her woes and crashed to the ground in a heap. Her body grew lighter as well.

Then she turned to the next wall and told it all her grievances against her first son's wife. And down came that wall, and she grew lighter still. She brought down the next wall with her tales against her second son, and the remaining fourth wall too with her complaints against her second daughter-in-law.

Standing in the ruins, with bricks and rubble all around her, she felt lighter in mood and lighter in body. She looked at herself and found she had actually lost all the weight she had gained in her wretchedness.

Then she went home.

This Tamil tale begins with a woman beleaguered and enclosed, and ends with her in the open, all her four walls demolished. The old woman tells her stories, her family secrets, only to lighten herself, not to enlighten anyone else. Nothing is said about her cruel family being converted, becoming kinder; only she has changed, unburdened of her sorrows.

In our classical literature, too, storytelling is a form of performance. Stories are not merely utterances; they are part of the action. They change its course, but they affect the addressee. In this tale, the tales of woe are told to express and affect the speaker's own mood, to change the speaker's state of being. Telling the story is cathartic for the teller of the tale. Such a notion of catharsis is not part of the Indian classical aesthetics. Note also how emotions have weight—the characters are literally, not metaphorically, "burdened," "heavy-" or "light-hearted." Tales and dreams take metaphors literally. Such literalization is not merely a literary device. It implies the sense that emotions and thoughts are substances. Material and nonmaterial things are part of a continuum of *sthula* and *sukshma*, "gross" and "subtle" substance allowing transformations. One substance may become the other.

In another tale, a barber discovers, while he is shaving the king, that the king has a donkey's ears:

The king orders the barber never to tell anyone about them on pain of death. So he keeps the secret, but the more he keeps it to himself the fatter he grows. His wife is alarmed and, after much trying, wheedles the secret out of him.

At once she begins to grow round, looking more and more pregnant, till one day, unable to bear the burden any longer, she digs a hole in the ground and tells her secret to the hole and covers it up.

Out of the buried secret springs a tree. One day, the palace drummer breaks a branch off the tree and makes some drumsticks. When he beats his drum in the palace assembly, the drum says, "*Dum dum dum*, the king, *dum dum*, has the ears, *dum dum*, of a donkey, *dum dum*. The king has the ears, *dum dum*, of a donkey, *dum dum!*"

Nothing is lost, only transformed.

Stories and words have not only weight; they also have wills and rages, and they can take different shapes, as in the following example, "The Tales' Revenge":

A rich man from Mysore has a son. Another, from Kanara, has a daughter. The men are traveling and meet on the way. When they find out about the son and the daughter, they begin to talk about a marriage alliance between them. While doing so, night comes on. They eat together, and as they are falling asleep, the Kanara man asks the other to tell him a story. The other man knows many stories but will not tell him any and goes to sleep.

While the Kanara man lies awake, he hears voices as in a dream. One says, "This man won't tell or teach a story to anyone. We are choking in his belly. When he walks under the banyan tree, I'll fell a branch and kill him." Another says, "If he escapes that, I'll crush him when he walks through the narrow passage between two rocks. The third one says, "I'll wait in his plate of rice as a fish hook and get him when he eats." The fourth says, "If he survives all of you, I'll become a snake and kill him."

In the morning, they resume their journey. The Kanara man reopens his marriage negotiations. They agree on dowries, gifts, and other such things. "Then let's go see the young man. We can fix the wedding dates as soon as we have done that," says the girl's father. And he adds, "You know how it is these days, we've been looking and looking for a bridegroom. Nothing fits. Sometimes even the hands seem too short." The Mysore man adds, "That's right. If it's not the hand, it's the leg that falls short," and invites the Kanara man to visit his house nearby. The other says, "I'll walk with you on one condition. You must do as I say for the next couple of days." The Mysore man finds the request odd but agrees, thinking, "These chaps from Kanara are a bit strange anyway." They start walking.

On their way, they come to a banyan tree. "Look here," says the Kanara man suddenly, "Let's not go under the banyan tree," and he guides the Mysore man away from it. No sooner have they passed it, when down comes a big branch. "It was lucky we were not walking under it," says the Mysore man, but the other says nothing. Then they come to a place where they have to pass between two rocks. The Kanara man leads the other man other man away from it and goes around the rocks, when suddenly a boulder comes rolling down into the passage. "Lucky we were not there," says the Mysore man.

When they reach his house, the Mysore man prepares a big meal, and they sit down to eat. As soon as he begins to eat his rice, the Kanara man asks that all the rice be given to him. He quickly snatches the other's plateful of rice and overturns it. The host is surprised and offended at his guest's strange behavior, but they move on to other kinds of food. When they've finished eating, the Kanara man asks, "Shall we see the young man now?" But the young man's mother says, "He isn't around. He has gone to his uncle's place." He is really inside, but they don't want him to be interviewed, that's all.

It's night. So they make beds and offer one to the guest. But the Kanara man insists on sleeping in the same room as his host and his wife. "How can you do that? We'll give you a bed in another room," says the shocked host. But the Kanara man insists on sleeping in the same room, and does.

He stays awake. While the host and his wife are fast asleep on their cot, a snake comes slithering in toward them. The wide-awake Kanara man pulls out a knife and cuts it down just as it is climbing the legs of the cot. Its blood spatters on the cheeks of the host's wife and, fearful lest it be poisonous, the Kanara man quickly wipes it off her cheek with his dhoti. She wakes up startled, finds this strange man touching her, and screams. Her husband wakes up and is about to attack when the guest restrains him. Before it gets worse, the Kanara man speaks out: "You may wonder why I have this knife in my hand, and why I touched your wife. I'm not after your wife. Just look under the cot." And he shows them the pieces of dead snake.

He also tells the bewildered Mysore man the whole story about the tales that had vowed revenge for not being told, and how he had saved his host from the banyan branch, the rocks, the fish hooks in the rice, and now the snake. He pulls out from his pocket the previous day's rice in his handkerchief, and shows him the fish hooks. "That's why I told you I'd come with you only if you would do as I asked you to. You can now see why." The Mysore man wonders aloud, "Why is it I have kept all the stories to myself?"

Then they return to the wedding talks, and in a few days the wedding takes place.

But the wedding guests gossip and whisper to each other, "Ayyayyo, look, the bride has one hand shorter than the other. And the bridegroom has half a leg!"

When the groom's father says to the bride's father, "How can you do this to me?" the other says, "But I told you, these days, everything is short, even hands!" The groom's father says, "But I told you, not only hands, even legs sometimes fall short!"

In this tale, stories have a special function. The two fathers both have something to conceal from each other—a daughter with a short hand and a son with half a leg. One of them asks for a story, and the other refuses to tell him one. There seems to be a suggestion that a secretive man tells no tales. In another tale, a clever woman finds a thief by letting them respond to a story she tells. To tell a story is to discover or reveal a secret.

And such stories also tell you why tales have to be told. They have an existence of their own, a secondary objectivity, like other cultural artifacts. They are part of what the philosopher Karl Popper calls the Third World, or World 3: neither subject nor object, but a third realm that depends on and enters into the construction of both subjects and objects.[3] It is in this sense perhaps that "myths speak man, rather than man speaking them," as Lévi-Strauss would say. They are there before any particular teller tells them; they hate it when they are not passed on to others, for they can come into being again and again only in that act of translation. If you know a tale, you owe it not only to others, but to the tale, to tell it; otherwise, it suffocates. Like chain letters, traditions have to be kept in good repair, transmitted, or else beware, such tales seem to say, things will happen to you. You can't hoard them.

In another story told all over South India, a son can't understand why his poor mother gives away half the food she earns each day:

The mother says that she is, after all, an ignorant old woman, that only Shiva knows the answer to such questions. So the son sets out to find Shiva and to ask him the question about giving away food. On the way the son meets a king who has built a tank, but it is dry; a snake who is stuck in a hole, unable to move in or out; a tree that is unable to produce any fruit; and a man whose legs are crippled by paralysis. As the son meets each of these people, each one tells him to ask Shiva for the cause of his special problem and a cure for it.

When the boy finds Shiva, he is chewing betel nut with Parvati after a hearty meal and tells the boy that each of them has been keeping something to himself—the king has a grown daughter whom he has not given away in marriage, the snake has a jewel in its hood he must give away, the paralytic has all sorts of knowledge he is hoarding, and the tree is hiding a treasure in its roots.

As you can guess, they are eager to give the young man the jewel, the learning, the treasure, and the princess—all, of course, thanks to his mother's *punya*, merit gathered by her daily gifts of food, with which the tale begins.

Daughters, wealth, knowledge, and food must circulate. These are *danas*, or gifts, that, in accordance with their nature, must be given away. Stories are no different. Communities and generations depend on such exchanges and transfers.

These notions are not confined to grandmothers, peasants, and unlettered types in the culture. In a largely nonliterate culture, persons of every kind and from every level have vast nonliterate substrata within them. Thus, folktales and other genres like proverbs, riddles, and songs, each in its own contextual slot, are constitutive of consciousness—not only for the illiterate but for everyone.[4] Oral literature precedes other kinds in India in the lives of individuals and communities. It offers forms, presumptions of meaning, that are filled out by later living. It would be interesting to study Indians' favorite folktales and their role in modeling and "scripting" Indians' psychic and relational lives. Even Sanskrit mythologies have to be studied not only from texts, as they have been, but on the ground—as they are selectively remembered and told in context. For they are not only in written texts; they also have a parallel life in the oral traditions. They have been studied as if they were all equidistant, equally well known to every native, equally important. And they have been quarried for the commentators' own (usually Western) concerns, like psychoanalysis, without any regard to which myths or episodes are valued by the users, or how and why. We need to work at Indian mythologies as if they were folklore in order to get a nuanced and true sense of what they are about. By doing so, we could also hear the dialogue between the Puranic mythologies and the nonliterate creations like those carried and polished and renewed by nameless and subtly powerful grandmothers.

TALES HAVE RELATIVES ALL OVER THE WORLD

In childhood when we heard stories like "The Tales' Revenge," we could not have known that they were told all over India, even all over the world, and that they had had past lives in old texts like the *Kathasaritsagara* (The Ocean of Story). I didn't know for a long time that there were international indexes of types and motifs, marked with numbers[5] just as library books, bank accounts, and prisoners—and not only prisoners—are these days. I discovered these folktale indexes when I accidentally met an American folklorist, Edwin Kirkland, in a small town in Karnataka in my early twenties, and we spent two happy evenings swapping tales and riddles and proverbs. When he went back to Bombay, he sent me Stith Thompson's *The Folktale*,[6] in which I found worldwide parallels for my household tales. I then reread the Grimms, discovered Afanasiev's Russian tales, and found the eleventh-century Sanskrit reworkings of local tales, *The Ocean of Story*. This last work was translated into English by C. H. Tawney in the nineteenth century, in ten volumes, with fascinating cultural histories by philologist N. M. Penzer on things we used every day, like betel leaves and umbrellas—their distribution, their uses in ritual, their profound symbolic values. The Brothers Grimm, or my idea of them, also became a model, and I started collecting folktales somewhat methodically from everyone around—my mother, aunt, friends, and people in the surrounding villages. I was twenty-three and I discovered what I had lived in and what had lived in me since childhood—the unofficial verbal world of the dialects, that literature without letters (*eluta eluttu* in Tamil).[7]

Connections and contrasts began to appear between the mother tongue tales and the Sanskrit myths, between the tales of Indian villages and kitchens and the European tales of Grimm and Afanasiev. I know now, for instance, that "The Tales' Revenge" has the same plot as "Faithful John" in the Grimms' collection except for not having the motif of the untold tales that vow vengeance on the teller who won't tell them. "Faithful John" is about a loyal servant who overhears two birds talking about four disasters that await his princely master—a falling tree, a heavy city gate, a collapsing bridge, a snake in the bedroom. The birds also say that anyone who reveals the secret will turn to stone. Without any explanations, Faithful John averts the disasters (as the bride's father does in "The Tales' Revenge") and finally when the prince, his master, suspects John of molesting his wife when John has just saved her from a serpent in the bedroom, he is forced to reveal the secret of the four disasters. As he finishes telling each one, a part of his body is petrified. With the fourth secret, John is all stone, a statue. He is restored to life only when the prince's wife is willing to sacrifice her infant son.

I find from the type indexes, and from old issues of journals like the *Indian Antiquary* (especially 1890–1900), that this version of the story is also told in different parts of India. But the oldest version is in the eleventh-century collection, *Kathasaritsagara,* which opens with the revenge of the untold tales. "The Tales' Revenge" is told among the Gond and Bastar tribes in central India. There are German studies of "Faithful John" showing that the story was initially Indian.[8] But, strangely, or not so strangely, all the indexes, even the Indic ones, assimilate the Indian tale to the European type of Faithful John, for the indexes are made from the point of view of European materials. Reversals of form and meaning are not perceived or noted—only similarities in motif and generalized structure guide the typology. "Faithful John," in the Grimms' collection, is about secrets that cannot be told or that can be told only on pain of death (also a classical Indian motif). But "The Tales' Revenge," and many other oral tales told in summary above, focus on the tale that cries out to be told, the secret that will kill its keeper or swell the body till he or she tells it all somewhere, to a tree, to walls that have no ears. That is an important difference.

Tales are interregional or international in plot and motif but not in what they tell and mean. Types in the indexes keep tallies, but they tell us nothing about meanings. Only individual tellers and their tellings do. Tale types and motifs are useful bibliographical devices; they must not mask differences but lead us back to their sources, the tellings, to what are usually dismissed as variants. For not invariants, but their living use by the variants, is our study. The much-maligned but quicksilver variant is our true focus.

STORIES FOR SMALL CHILDREN

The stories change a great deal depending on where they are told, who tells them, and to whom they are told. The grandmother telling a story to a child in a kitchen at dinnertime, the *vratakatha* (or ritual tale) told in the outer parts of the house or the yard, the mendicant teller who recounts a romantic tale on the verandah, or narratives of the professional bard who is invited to sing, dance, and recite a long religious or romantic epic in a rich man's hall or a public area—these are all different in genre, style, number of stock formulas, and topics, in the accompaniment of other actors or instruments or props like pictures.

We seem to move through a continuum here from *akam* to *puram*, from "interior" forms to "exterior" ones, as the classical Tamils would say. These two important words carry a set of concentric meanings according to context. *Akam* means interior, heart, self, house, household; *puram* means exterior, outer parts of the body, others, the yard outside the house, people outside the household. I have argued elsewhere that genres, themes, occasions, styles, and other discourse properties in the South Indian communities tend to illustrate the poetics of akam and puram. They come in arrays, in a sort of ecology of genres, where each has a niche, a function. Each occupies, expresses, and constitutes a "finite province of reality." Myth and folktale, proverb and riddle, theater and ritual performance have places on this continuum, this scale of forms.[9] Let me illustrate the notion that tales have special features for certain audiences with just one kind of story, the kind that is told to small children.

Here is one we all heard as small children—"Sister Crow and Sister Sparrow." It is a story told in several languages today in South India:

> Sister Crow and Sister Sparrow are friends. Crow has a house of cow dung, Sparrow one of stone. A big rainstorm washes away Crow's house, so she goes to Sparrow and knocks on her door.
>
> Because she is feeding her children, Sparrow makes Crow wait at first. When Crow knocks again, Sparrow is feeding her husband. When Crow knocks a third time, Sparrow is putting her children to bed. Finally, she lets Crow in and offers her several places to sleep. Crow chooses to sleep on the chickpea sack.
>
> All night long, she munches on chickpeas and makes a *katum-katum* noise. Whenever Sparrow asks her what the noise is, Crow says, "Nothing really. Remember you gave me a betelnut? I'm biting on it." By morning she has eaten all the chickpeas in the sack. She cannot control her bowels, so she fills the sack with her excrement before she leaves.
>
> Sparrow's children go there in the morning to eat some peas and muck their hands up with what Crow has left.
>
> Sparrow is angry. She invites Crow again to visit, and when she is about to sit down, puts a hot iron spatula under her and brands her behind. Crow flees, crying *Ka! Ka!* in pain.

Children laugh a lot at this story—especially at the crow filling the sack with her excrement, Sparrow's children getting their hands dirty with it, and Sparrow's revenge. But it is an ambiguous story. Sparrow, obviously a tidy and successful housewife, is not given to incontinence; her house is firm, her routine well ordered—psychoanalysts would happily relate these virtues to anal continence.[10] Crow is disorderly, incontinent. Her house of dung cannot withstand a storm; she can neither control her all-night guzzling nor the morning's unloading of her bowels. She is punished by a branding on her bottom. On the other hand, I have always felt a certain ambivalence, and so did the tellers and the other children, about Sparrow. She is not generous or hospitable; she keeps Crow waiting in the rain. Because of her grudging hospitality, one feels Sparrow somewhat deserves Crow's untidy return. Children laugh gleefully at Sparrow's discomfiture and enjoy Crow's filling the sack up with nightsoil.

The typical audience for this kind of story consists of children who are just being toilet trained (three to five years after birth, much later than children in America are trained). Patterns of toilet training are said to be significant in any psychoanalytic interpretation of personality. We know that Indian patterns of child rearing are strikingly different from American ones.[11] The Crow and the Sparrow story, I've often thought, was part of our toilet training. Many of the stories of this sort are not only about small animals (sparrows, ants, frogs) winning over bigger ones. They are also quite preoccupied with urination and defecation, with sphincter control, as children of that age tend to be. Martha Wolfenstein's book on children's humor documents this preoccupation in English children.[12] A collection of Indian stories told to small children would be instructive. Such stories also talk about the discomfiture of small people—mocked for their shortness or thick lips and the anger they feel, the projections that cannot quite distinguish self from nonself. I shall give only one more example—"Dwarfs":

> A he-dwarf and a she-dwarf lived together. When the dwarf went to dig holes in a field, the she-dwarf brought him food. She lowered her basket and called him:
>
> "Midget, midget, come eat!"
>
> When he heard her call him midget, the dwarf was angry. He went after her to cut her to pieces. She ran. But he followed till he caught her, and then

cut her to pieces. He buried the pieces in the earth, and a *togari* plant sprouted on it. The togari plant grew tall. The pods dried and rattled in the wind. One day, when the dwarf was walking that way, he heard the togari plant rattle its pods and say, "Midget, midget, *gulak, gulak*!"

So he cut the plant and gave it, leaf and pods and all, to the buffalo. The buffalo ate it and mooed, "Midget, midget, *booynk, booynk*!"

He killed the buffalo and gave its meat to the dog, which began to bark, "Midget, midget, *owk, owk*!"

In a fury, the dwarf cut up the dog and threw it into the river. As it flowed over the stones, the river said, "Midget, midget, *dadak, dadak*!"

So the dwarf took a knife and went into the river to cut it to pieces. But he drowned in it. Thus the he-dwarf and the she-dwarf came to a bad end.

But you are here and alive. Sleep now.

I must hasten to add that tales are not psychological in the way they treat the insides of each character; most folktale characters have no insides, no psychological depth. But the tales explore psychological issues in the design and outcome of the action. In the Crow and the Sparrow story, the contrast in characters, their houses, their behavior, and the presence of an audience of children in the story itself enact psychological notions. Like all fantasies (and unlike psychological novels), tales do not explore or express psychological truths in parts, characters, or single episodes but in relations, in the patterns and figures these elements make as a whole. All sorts of things we express conceptually are expressed through these narratives in their concrete relational webs: self and other, developmental stages, male and female, rites of passage, intimacy and alienation. Even more than mythologies, which contrary to fashionable psychological explanations, tend to deal with social and cosmic issues rather than psychological matters, the domestic tale is concerned with near kin and family, with akam in the Tamil sense, as interior forms, and therefore with all those relations with oneself and significant others that together make or unmake, move or arrest, the self in its career.

Tales speak of what cannot usually be spoken. Ordinary decencies are violated. Incest, cannibalism, pitiless revenge are explicit motifs in this fantasy world, which helps us face ourselves, envisage shameless wish fulfillments, and sometimes "by indirection find direction out."

What is supposed by analysts to be repressed and hidden is open and blatant in these tales: fathers pursue daughters; brothers, sisters. Cannibal sisters eat their younger siblings; mothers marry sons unwittingly and bear sons, thereby messing up neat kinship diagrams; and young men wish to marry no women but instead their own left halves.

BEGINNINGS AND ENDINGS

The tales do not always follow an opening formula like "Once upon a time." Yet special phrases found only in folktales, like *ondanondu kaladalli*, "at one time" in Kannada, and *ore oru urie*, "in a certain town" in Tamil, often mark the opening of tales. These turn the key for our entry into a taleworld and a taletime, and let us cross a threshold into another kind of space.

And there are closing formulas that mark our exits from this tale world. My favorite in Kannada is *avaralli*, *navilli*, "they are there, and we are here." In Telugu, they say, "The story has gone to Kanchi, and now we come home." In Tamil, they say, *kade kadeyam, karanamam*, "seems like a story, O a story, as if that's a reason."

These closures break any identification with the characters, separate our world from those of the stories, emphasize their fictive nature, their artifice and fantasy. Furthermore, when my favorite tellers tell a story, there are no adjectives at all describing inner or outer features (as there are in bardic tellings)—that is, there is no editorializing, no telling us what to feel. It is almost as if the story tells itself. When the characters speak, there is no sense of realism but a sense that they are speaking in quotation. They seem to say, *Larvatus prodeo*, "I advance, pointing to my mask," as Roland Barthes would have said.

Folklore, contrary to romantic notions of its spontaneity or naturalness, is formal. It makes visible its forms. Identification and disidentification (of the listeners with the characters) have their triggers in the tales and happen at different stages of a tale or a performance—not unlike the processes by which a person is possessed or dispossessed in the course of a possession ritual.

I once found in a tale translated from Oriya a charming closing sentence. It says very well what I wish to say about breaking the link with the fictive world that may seem quite real while it lasts, though it is not. At the end of a romantic king-and-queen story, the Oriya teller says, "I saw the prince the other day at the market, but he wouldn't talk to me."

ENDNOTES

[1] For this observation I am indebted to Professor V. Narayana Rao, who is a speaker of Telugu and an expert on Telugu literature.

[2] See Donald Davidson's first essay in *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). My discussion here, while it is indebted to these writings, arises out of my Indian materials. Actions and events are different ways of describing the same happenings. Furthermore, actions are a particular kind of event.

[3] Karl Popper, *Unended Quest, an Intellectual Autobiography* (Glasgow: Fontana/Collins, 1980), 187: "We may include in World 3 . . . all the products of the human mind, such as tools, institutions, and works of art," or what anthropologists would call culture.

[4] Roma Chatterjee argues this point in detail in "Folklore and the Formation of Popular Consciousness in a Village in the Purulia District of West Bengal," Ph.D. thesis, University of Delhi, 1985.

[5] "The Tale's Revenge" would be the Indian analogue to Tale Type 516 in the international index. Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (Helsinki: Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1964).

[6] Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (New York: The Dryden Press, 1946).

[7] In the 1971 census more than 3,000 mother tongues are registered, with the names of the speech varieties that the speakers themselves said they spoke. Linguists have classified and subsumed these speech varieties, or dialects, under 105 or so languages that belong to four language families. Ninety of these 105 languages are spoken only by less than 5 percent of the entire population, 65 of them by small tribes. Only 15 languages (including Sanskrit) are written, read, and spoken by 95 percent of the people. The literatures of these 15 languages, some of which have long histories, are just beginning to be studied and translated outside their regions. A literature like that of Tamil goes back 2,000 years, and several others like those of Bengali and Gujarati at least 800 years. We must recognize that, in addition to these, there are oral traditions in every community, Hindu, Jain, Christian, Muslim, and Parsi, and in each of the 3,000-odd mother tongues that we have classified under the 105 languages. These oral traditions consist of genres like proverbs, riddles, songs, ballads, tales, and epics, to name only a few. All these myriad dialects carry oral literatures, which is what we may call Indian folklore.

One way of defining verbal folklore for India is that it is the literature of the dialects, those mother tongues of the village, street, kitchen, tribal hut, and wayside teashop. This is the wide base on which all Indian literatures rest. We have valued and attended only to the top of the pyramid. For a detailed discussion of these materials for any study of Indian civilization, see A. K. Ramanujan, "Who Needs Folklore?—The Relevance of Folklore to South Asian Studies," The Wattumull Memorial Lecture, University of Hawaii, March 1988 (forthcoming).

[8] Quoted by Stith Thompson.

[9] For a fuller exposition of this view, see my "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," in *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987).

[10] See Ernest Jones, "Anal-Erotic Character Traits," in *Papers on Psychoanalysis,* 5th ed. (London: Balliere, Tindall, and Cox, 1950).

[11] Sudhir Kakar, *The Inner World, A Psycho-Analytic Study of Childhood and Society in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1978), 1034.

[12] Martha Wolfenstein, *Children's Humor: A Psychological Analysis* (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1954).

Voices of Children

Veena Das

The child in Indian society is both object and subject; in a world of adults—of parents, politics, and play—he learns to respond to what he sees and what he dreams in a language belonging to the world of children. There is no assumption that the child embodies innocence; at an early age the Indian child sees that games are invested with deadly serious implications. Children model themselves on the adults they witness, enacting festive occasions like weddings and courtship—looking to their own, and their culture's, future. But they often "play" the inequities they remember, recording violence on an honest slate: the child is stranger to neither grim violence nor wild imagination. Living in a world created before them, Indian children carve out one of their own.

I explore the world of the child in India from two different perspectives.[1] The first is that of the community of mother and child, created in the everyday life of the family. The second is that of the child engaged in the active task of interpreting this world. As exiles from the stable communities of men who are linked together in patrilineal succession, the community of mother and child creates and interprets the self and the world in ways that are tangential to the dominant and objectified ideologies of the society. Here we see how

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the world is communicated to the child, and how interaction with the family shapes his sense of self.

The child, however, is not a passive recipient of the world. In his own play and games he gives it an inner reality; he subverts it; submits to it; learns how to organize his experience so that he is not merely a character in someone else's story but can create a narrative of his own. In this paper I try to maintain a bifocal view of the child—he is both the one who is spoken about and the one who speaks.

Many children will be called in this paper as witness. I came to know some of these children in relatively quiescent periods in the course of my doing fieldwork among urban Punjabi families in Delhi. The other children described in this paper belong to the artisan Siglikar caste of Sindhi Sikhs who were living in the resettlement colony of Sultanpuri in Delhi.[2] Their lives were not only enmeshed in poverty and crime, often found in slum areas of modern cities in India, but they had also been touched by annihilating violence in the riots of November 1984 against the Sikhs, following the assassination of the then prime minister, Indira Gandhi. This paper grew out of my intimacy with these children. As Anna Freud is reported to have observed, "it is hard for us to know what to think about a particular moment of a child's life—unless we have the time to know the child over the months and years."[3]

The child in Indian society is not only an object of commands and manipulation—he is also a civilizational obsession. Every stage in childhood is marked by ritual that incorporates the child into the society in which he is born. Although the idea of the stages of life is very marked in the life-cycle rituals in India, I have not used that framework in this article. It seems to me that the idea of stages of childhood is important if one wishes to present sequences and disjunctions; if, on the other hand, one wishes to examine the relation that children's worlds bear to adult worlds in the issues raised by social constructionism, then a synchronic framework may present advantages.[4]

In Indian society the child is not regarded as a tabula rasa on which society inscribes whatever it wishes. Rather, the child is believed to bring with him memories of his previous birth as well as preconception memories—the *samskaras* he may have formed in the mother's womb. The Hindu Newars of Nepal say that the childhood rituals are necessary to make the child forget his past life. When an infant smiles or suddenly cries out in his sleep, the Newars believe that this is because he is remembering his past life and is either saddened by the separation or is recalling happy times.[5] The child, then, is said to be born with a memory of who he was, and unless his parents and other kinsmen can make him forget his past life, he may never become rooted in his new one.

Along with memories of his past life, the child also brings with him an ability to communicate with gods, goddesses, jinn (Muslim spirits that can take various forms), and other fabulous creatures that cohabit our world but with whom we, as adults, cannot communicate unless we have special powers. The infant's babbling is often seen as another language with which he is "talking" to these creatures, and it is said that as the child learns human language he forgets the divine language with which he came into the world. Just how does such a conception of the child transform itself into the everyday[6] interactions between parents and children? I shall give examples in the next section to show how concepts of personhood are forged out of these ideas in the everyday life of the child.

COMMUNICATIVE PATTERNS IN THE FAMILY

The child, we have said, is seen as coming into the world with a memory and an understanding of languages that elude the adult. These concepts about the child find expression in interactions within the family, especially between women and children. Mothers not only teach infants the use of language and other social skills but also in their very manner of communicating make a gift of self and the world to the child. I may say that often the mother not only talks *to* the child but she "talks" the child into being—gives it, as it were, an embodiment in language.

Research on communication patterns between adults and children shows that in speaking to little children adults often modify their speech patterns in systematic ways. These modifications, known as the baby-talk register, include use of high pitch, exaggerated and slow intonation, diminutive terms, and repetition of words. In this pattern of communication, the mother richly interprets the child and makes up for his deficiencies by engaging in protoconversations, often speaking for the child as well as for herself. Equality is maintained between them since the mother tries to gloss over the deficiencies in the child's linguistic skills by taking his perspective and amplifying the content of the communication. This pattern of communication, often observed in white middle-class families in America, is consistent with other cultural assumptions of that society.[7]

Let me take an analogous situation from the Indian context. I recorded the following exchanges between a mother and her eight-month-old baby as she was bathing him, watched over by the baby's grandmother. The baby was seated cross-legged in the *angan* (an inner courtyard just next to the kitchen shared in common by six families living in the same building). Women and children came and went, doing their daily chores.

Mother:
Nai nai nai.
Bathing bathing bathing.
Kaple kholen?
Shall we open your clothes?

Shailu (eight months old):
Da da da da (fist in mouth—sucking loudly).

Mother:
Kahndai han.
Says yes (opens his clothes).
Calo ji pahelwan di malich kalo.
Come, let us massage the wrestler
(rubs oil on body; baby begins to thrash around).
Hun chona chona bana dayai?
Shall we make you lovely lovely now?
(Rubs him with soap; baby begins to cry as soap gets in his eye.)

Grandmother:
Oh, oh, oh, oh
(joining in, making crying sounds imitating the baby's; the baby cries more loudly).

Mother:
Bas, bas, bas, raja beta.
There, there, there, my prince son.

Hun pani paiyea?
Shall we pour water now?
Ganga, Ganga, Jamna, Jamna.
Here comes the Ganga, here comes the Jamna.
(The baby begins to enjoy himself. The mother dries him, picks him up, and dresses him.)
How handsome you look!

Grandmother:
Let the evil be cast away.

We can see in this encounter of mother and baby that the baby is treated as a communicative partner. The mother uses very few imperatives. Instead, she interprets every action and sound as if it were an attempt on the part of the child to communicate. Yet when the baby begins to behave as a baby and to cry loudly, both mother grandmother take on his perspective by imitating him and uttering the same sounds as he does. Some of the features of the baby-talk register are encountered here. For instance, the mother uses what is known as the *totali zaban*, which consists primarily in avoiding certain sounds considered to be harsh and substituting soft sounds. Her intonation is exaggerated and slow, and she repeats words. She acts as if every movement in the bath stems from the desire of the baby, which he constantly communicates to her, rather than from being imposed upon him. He wishes to have an oil massage, for his body is as strong as that of a wrestler. Similarly, soap is to be rubbed on his body, as he wishes to be made handsome. And his permission is sought before he can be bathed. Even his crying is made a legitimate response to the soap that gets into his eyes, as shown by the mother and the grandmother taking the perspective of the baby and joining him in his cry. Finally, pouring the water upon him becomes the act of bringing the sacred rivers Ganga and Jamna right up to the doorstep of the house, recalling the motif of the devotion of sage Atri's wife, who forced the Ganga to come to her doorstep since her husband was unable to go to the river. We see that in the simple act of having a bath, the child has learned that his mother's actions stem from his agency, that his body can be manipulated only with his permission, and that when he cries he is not going to be scolded, for there is a child in the mother who will join in his protest even against her own carelessness.

Apparent similarities between the communicative patterns described for white middle-class families and the case described above may hide important differences. As Ochs and Schiefelin suggest, in white middle-class families the mothers overcompensate for the difficulties of the child in accordance with the shared assumption in American culture that the deficiencies of a person are to be glossed over in social communication.[8] This would suggest that the child is seen as lacking in personhood and the mother tries to compensate for this lack through overinterpretation of the child's sounds and gestures. In the Indian case, however, the child is seen as already being a full person in domains to which the mother does not have access. Thus the child is believed to have desires and memories that translate themselves into behavior that can be interpreted according to well-defined clues in the culture. It is this which allows the mother to interpret the babbles and the gestures of the child as meaningful. I give a second example to show how the notion of memory may be evoked in the communication with the child.

One day, Lakshmi, a baby three months of age, was wailing loudly. Her grandfather carried her around in his arms, swinging her and making all kinds of baby sounds. The baby seemed inconsolable. At one stage he said, "Oh baby, you are Lakshmi. You are the goddess. Then why do you cry?" As it happened, the baby stopped crying, at which the grandfather turned to me and said, "See, she needed to be reminded who she was." This episode was treated in the light-hearted way in which the entire theory about the child's relation to his past life and to the creatures of the cosmos is treated, but resonates with ideas that are well formed at the level of myths. For example, one of the famous episodes in the life of Krishna as a baby was that Yashodha, his foster mother, was scolding him for having stolen butter. To prove his innocence, Krishna opened his mouth so that she could see that he did not have any butter in it. What Yashoda saw were the three universes of heaven, earth, and the netherworld. Such ideas are found in numerous other myths and stories and give a certain texture and tonality to the communicative patterns that adults establish with little babies.

In the examples given above, the baby is a direct addressee of the speech of the mother or the grandfather. I give another example now, taken again from the interactive context of grooming in order to show a totally different set of assumptions about communication patterns. One of the daily rituals of women among the families I studied was to comb and tie each other's hair just before they went to bed. One day, Meena, a little girl of seven, was having her hair combed by her grandmother while her father was watching. Meena had just had her ears and nose pierced, an important occasion in the life of a little girl, and was wearing little black beads strung together for her ears and nose. Throughout this encounter Meena did not talk at all, but she was the subject of conversation between her father and her grandmother. The grandmother would address her only to correct her.

Grandmother:
Sidhi baith ni.
Sit straight, oh
(gives her an affectionate smack on the back).
Tu meri tarah buddhi ho gayin hain?
Have you become old like me?
Sidhi vi nai baith sakdi.
Cannot even sit straight.

Father:
Mar gayi—kini soni lagdi yai ai kale motiyan nal!
May she die—how beautiful she looks with those black beads!

Grandmother:
Kale moti? Ai roop tan heere pain.
Black beads? Let this beauty be given diamonds.
Sidhi bath ni—phumiri di tarah sir hilda hi rahenda hai.
Sit straight, you—shaking about your head like a little top
(gives her another smack on the back).

As distinct from the first episode of the bath, here we see that the child is only incidentally addressed; the main conversation is between her father and grandmother, though the child is the subject of their discussion. Shall we then say that she becomes a nonperson in this mode of communication? I suspect that this is not the case.

The mode of speech that author A. K. Ramanujan has characterized as "causing to be overheard" is a very frequent way of communicating in the Indian family. Much of the latent communication in the family takes place by replacing the overt addressee of a given speech act by the real addressee. The Punjabis even have a way of referring to this mode of talking by distinguishing between the verb *kehna* (to tell someone something) and *sunana* (causing someone to hear something). In an earlier paper I have described how a communication apparently addressed to the daughter may in fact be intended for the son's wife. I have argued that this mode of communication is particular to women and is referred to as women's speech (*auratan vali gallan*).[9] In the particular episode described above, the child learns that the speech addressed to her is in fact not the message of the communication; rather, a conversation which completely bypasses her is the intended communication. The grandmother is giving her a smack and using abusive language—*marjani*—but the gesture and tone convey to the child a different message. Affectionate abuses are often used to avert the evil eye. A child may be addressed with the words "May you die" but in a tone which expresses affection. Thus, the nature of the communication teaches something to the child about the nature of the world and especially of the relation that women maintain to language as an institution. The child learns that the nature of social relations is not transparent but obscure and that language functions in a veiled manner precisely because transparency is not valued in social communication. This veiling of the self in communication, the use of split references, is a device to which women turn again and again throughout their adult lives. Sometimes they may speak in patriarchal voices and yet convey the alien origin of the discourses that they engage in by a change in tone, parody, or repetition of the same words in a different modality, such as that of regret.

In the examples given above, we have seen two different conceptions of the self. In the first, the child is seen as a full communicative partner and the mother manages to create a protoconversation by interpreting and giving meaning to every sound and gesture that the baby makes. Yet we have seen that the mother can suddenly shift her perspective and become the baby in joining him by imitation. In the other case we see how a child may be made to understand that even as a passive listener, he or she is the addressee of a particular form of communication. This does not mean that the child has become a nonperson but rather that she has learned to interpret the passive stance taken in communication as conveyer or receiver of meaning. The latter mode of communication, I tend to think, is particularly important for women, for their relation to language as an institution is itself indirect.

Under certain conditions, however, the male child may also have to learn to interpret the meaning of passivity or of apparent indifference in a new way. I describe now one such situation in the context of a joint family. This family included a widowed sister of the head of the household who had been compelled to seek refuge along with her little son, Shankar, of eight years, in the brother's house because of mistreatment in her husband's family. The situation had been made very much more complicated by the fact that she had always got along better with the wife of another brother, who, however, was unable to provide her with a home.

The episode that I describe took place over dinner and was by no means exceptional. Sarla, the sister, was serving food. Her brother and his children were seated on the floor. The brother's wife was in the kitchen making hot *chapatis* (flattened rolls of bread cooked over an open fire). Sarla's son was sitting at the extreme end of the row of people with a cousin slightly older than him. As Sarla brought out hot chapatis, the children would clamor, "It's my turn—it's my turn—my chapati has been finished for ages." Sarla's son would also join in. Sarla would put chapatis on everyone's plate but simply pass by her own son. After a while the little boy began to whine. When Sarla's brother noticed his empty plate, he said, "Why don't you give a chapati to him? Is he your enemy?" Then he called to the little boy to come and sit next to him and he himself served him a chapati. This pattern of interaction had many variations. Sometimes Sarla's brother's wife would come marching out of the kitchen and scold one of the children for not looking after the boy. At other times one of the cousins would take him under her wing. The point is that Sarla's feigned indifference to the child, and her refusal to listen to his requests were simply marks of her status as a dependent. Only a member of the brother's family could take an active interest in the child, and this child had to learn that the mother was not indifferent toward him but rather that her passivity was an invitation to the others to show an active interest in her child.

How did the child construct himself in this communicative strategy? I had an opportunity to go back to this family after about ten years of having completed my work with them. This child, then eighteen, was completing school. I asked him if he remembered anything about his childhood. How did it feel when he was little to grow up in his mama's house? "Oh, they were great," he said. "Who gives a place to impoverished relatives any more? But all those years, I understood my position so well. I knew even when I was six that if there were left-over chapatis, then my mother would be the one to get them. If there were sweets, it was better to pretend that I hated sweets than to wait in anguish and see which one of them would think of offering me one." The social structure of the family was thus dramatically displayed to this child at mealtimes every day.

We stated earlier that in communicating with the child, the mother is not only teaching him language acquisition but is also communicating the notions of self and the world. Some of these notions may now be systematized. We find, first of all, that although there is extensive use of the baby-talk register as the adult takes the perspective of the child to create a meaningful conversation, the conception of the child is not constructed in terms of lack. Rather, lack is reinterpreted as the modality of the baby, who is more comfortable with divine language than with human language.

Although interactions between mother and infant are very frequent—for instance, mothers spend a lot of time gazing at their babies—this dyadic interaction is embedded in multipersonal contexts. The two partners in the dialogue assume the presence of a third. The third person sometimes speaks on behalf of the baby—and sometimes on behalf of the adult. This point is again consistent with one of the important assumptions about the relation of people to language as an institution—that sometimes one's speech articulates one's own stance in relation to the world but that the language of the other also resides within oneself. Any interpretation of communication in the Indian family requires an understanding of this double relation to language that a person must necessarily maintain. Thus, self is not only forged by one's own active relation to the environment but also through the forces represented as the voices of the other which come to inhabit the individual.

Following from the above assumption, we can state that there is a complex relationship between the person conceived as an active agent and the person perceived as a passive recipient of forces that emanate from outside himself. Passive states, however, are not seen as lacking in intentionality. In the case of Shankar, growing up in his uncle's house, we saw that the refusal of the mother to respond to his cry was not intended to convey rejection but to communicate their dependent position in the joint family. Corresponding to Merleau Ponty's idea that the body can have a passive intentionality we find here intentionality in nonresponse. Similarly, Meena learned that the apparent addressee of a communication may not be the real addressee at all. These complex notions about the nature of the world are communicated through the everyday interactions in the family. Culture is not communicated to the child in any society as commands but is, rather, embedded in a series of different contexts. It is not a single imperative voice that the child in Indian society hears but a multitude of voices.

CULTURAL ARTIFACTS

In the previous section we saw the nature of communication between mother and child. In this section I should like to show how this community is recreated in the stories, poems, rhymes, and riddles that are created for the child.

There is no separate group of literature that can be characterized as exclusively for children in India. It was only in the nineteenth century that in some regions such as Bengal there was a literary movement to create *swadeshi* literature for children as part of the nationalist movement.[10] Children, however, hear stories in many contexts in India and participate in storytelling on occasions that are not exclusively or even especially for children. For example, the stories about gods and goddesses, and stories from the Ramayana and the Puranas are related on ritual occasions. In the villages, the village festival or the Ramalila is an event of great importance in which stories may be told, dramatized, or rendered in music or dance. The various fasts of women during the year are of special relevance. These invariably include telling stories that are ritually marked for children and feeding special foods to them. The participation of children gives a certain tone and texture to these occasions. On such occasions women and children form a community of storytellers and listeners that stands distinct from the community of adult men.

Of special importance for the understanding of the community of women and children are the rhymes and riddles in which the child is the direct addressee and the mother the teller of tales. Such rhymes and riddles are constructed around the activities that bind mother and child, such as those of bathing, feeding, and rocking the child to sleep. These are usually for the very young child, and the rhymes are rhythmically related to the imagined movements of the body.

Unlike nursery rhymes in English, these do not create third-person characters, such as Little Miss Muffet or Tom the piper's son, but directly address the child. These rhymes can be divided into those that valorize the child and its beauty, those that present the structure of family and kinship through the eyes of the mother, and those that express regret about the social forces over which the mother has no control.

I first give some examples of the rhymes valorizing the child.[11]

> *Khuku amar sona, shainkara deke, mohar kete godiye debo goyna.*
> *Tomra keyo koro na mana.*
> Little one, all my gold, I shall call the jeweler and make it into ornaments for you.
> None of you shall forbid me.

Or another rhyme in the same mode:

> *Chander pane cheye cheye rat keteche koto*
> *Tayi to sona chander kona peye chi mone moton*
> *Dhan ke neeye bon ke jabo aar korbo ki*
> *Chupke chupke boshe boshe dhan ke nirakhi.*
> Looking at the moon, how many nights have I spent.
> So I have the golden one, the particle of the moon, the one after my heart.
> Taking this treasure, I shall go into the forest; what else shall I do?
> Hiding there, sitting down, let me gaze at my treasure.

In these rhymes it is the beauty of the little daughter that is valorized. In others the mother dresses up her little son, who looks like a prince:

> *Khokhun jabe naye lal jutva paye.*
> *Bado bado rajar meye uki mare chaye.*
> *Amar khokha phirau na takaye.*
> Little boy shall go on a boat, red shoes on his feet.
> Daughters of great kings shall watch stealthily.
> My little boy shall not even turn his head to see.

One other kind of rhyme takes an indulgent view of the child's problems in performing public acts, as in this verse:

> *Khokha gailo mach dhorte khir nadir teere.*
> *Macha neeye gailo kola vyanga chipa neeye gailo cheele.*
> Little boy went to catch fish on the banks of the river of milk.
> The frog took away the fish and the kite took away the fishing rod.

And in this verse:

> *Ay re ay tiye, nay bhara deeye.*
> *Na neeye gailo boal mache.*
> *Tayi to dekhe bhondor nache.*
> *Oh re bhondor phire cha.*
> *Khokhar nachon dekhe ja.*
> Come, oh parrot, with a fully laden boat.
> The boat was taken away by the shark.
> The otter danced watching this.
> Oh, otter, turn back and look.
> See the dance of my little boy.

We saw in the first section how the baby is valorized in the context of bathing and grooming. These jingles express the cultural mode through which the mother's voice becomes the mirror in which the baby can experience his body as beautiful. In the jingles addressed to the baby daughter, the great longing of the mother to completely possess the daughter is expressed. The daughter is the particle of the moon, and the mother wishes to go away to the forest to hide this great treasure from the eyes of the world. Similarly, the little boy goes to the *khirasagar*—the ocean of milk located in heaven—to catch fish. The otter is invited to witness the dance of the baby, which celebrates the mischievous spirit of the child as a principle of nature itself. The narrator in these stories is clearly the mother, and it is her voice that valorizes the child rather than commanding him to be obedient or setting out rewards and punishments according to good behavior.

In the second set of rhymes, the kinship structure is presented through the eyes of the mother. Here the house of the *mama*—the mother's brother—becomes the desirable place in which the child is given bowls of milk and rice and is never scolded. In one of the popular rhymes in Hindi, the moon is addressed as *chanda mama*—as the mother's brother. The curses are reserved for the men who take away the women of the house, such as the *jamai*—a term for the daughter's husband. The women who have been married out are invited to come back—especially when the child is sleepy and a lapse from reality is permitted.

> *Ghum padano masi pishi moder badi esho*
> *palang nai khat nai chokh pete bosho.*
> *Kappor bhora pan debo gal bhore khao.*
> *Khokhar chokhe ghoom nai ghoom diye jao.*
> Oh, mother's sister and father's sister—come to our house to put the baby to bed.
> There is no ornamental bed, nor even a plain one—but sit in the eyes of the little one.
> I shall give you a leaf flavored with camphor.
> Fill your mouth with it.
> In the eyes of my little son there is no sleep—grant him the gift of sleep.

Kinship is structured differently for men and for women. As objects of exchange, the women do not have a voice. Yet, as the French anthropologist Lévi-Strauss, who formulated the laws of exchange in marriage, recognized, even in a man's world woman cannot be treated only as a sign, for she is also a generator of signs.[12] As evidence of the signs generated by women, he points to the feminine poetry of a culture which tries to seize and fix that fleeting moment when it was permitted to believe that the law of exchange could be evaded. The rhymes that the mother addresses to the child try to reverse those laws of exchange by which she is exiled from the kingdom of her father and the child is brought under the regime of the law of the father. The community of women and children that we referred to in the context of the sacred stories recited by women is articulated through these rhymes.

In the third category are the rhymes in which the mother recognizes a future over which she has no control. A note of gentle melancholy is introduced when the daughter is described as going away to her husband's house and when the mother confides to the child her inability to provide him with food. In one rhyme Annapurna is described as being as fair as the cream of milk. Tomorrow, however, she will go to a stranger's house and the stranger's son will give her a slap. In tears she will come to the house of her father's younger brother and will fall on his feet begging him to take her to her father's house. In one of the lullabies this melancholy finds expression in the mother's mention of famine, the tax collector, and fields that are without crops. Thus the adult voice appears not always as the voice of authority but sometimes as the voice of regret, for the adults are shown to be as bound by the norms of society and the exigencies of those who are in power as the child, who shall one day have to submit to them.

The helplessness before raiders, tax collecters, and the government, however, is only one of the modalities of representing the authoritarian world to the child. The other modality is that of gentle mockery, in which usually it is the gods and goddesses who come in for banter and laughter. In the great Sanskritic tradition one finds solemn and even awesome representations of gods and goddesses who control, punish, and need to be placated. In the world of children's rhymes, witness how this relation is altered:

> *Ganesh dada pet ti nada khache shudhu gada gada.*
> Brother Ganesh with the fat tummy: he just eats lots and lots.

Here the son of the goddess Parvati, Ganesh, who has an elephant head and who presides over the initiation of all auspicious rituals, is made into a figure of fun. His brother Kartik, the war god, is also similarly transformed. He is described as a fool who cannot decide whether to cling to his mother Parvati or to make his way in the world on his own. Shiva is described as having three wives: one cooks, the other eats, and the third is constantly getting angry and leaving for her father's house. Though there are no separate figures that belong only to the world of childhood, the figures of the adult world themselves change shape and form and are transformed into objects of irony. In the first section we described how the absolute voice of authority is only one of the voices among others that the child may hear and that it is interrogated in the inner dialogue of the self; here we see how it is mocked.

Following the lead given by the French historian Ariès in his work on the history of childhood,[13] some authors have suggested that there is no separate phase of childhood in Indian society. Indeed, the idea of childhood as the phase of idyllic innocence is one of the monumental myths of modern Western societies, and it is true that one cannot classify cultural artifacts into neat classes dividing adult artifacts from those of the child. However, this does not mean that there is not a separate modality for presenting the world to the child. In the mockery, the interrogations, the reversals that the child sees of the adult world, the meaning of authority undergoes a change, for although the child may be submitted to sanctions of all kinds in his everyday life, this comes to have a heterogeneous character as memories. These other times of reversal and interrogation are carried into everyday life.

I have stated that the adult worlds may sometimes be seen as transformations by the process of substitution of context of the creative worlds of the child. Here I would like to remark that in their relation to gods and goddesses, adult women strive to be like children. A woman once showed me the miniature toylike objects she had collected for her favorite deity, Krishna. There was the little glass in which she fed him milk, the small mirror she held before him so that he could admire himself on festive occasions, the little *sarauti* (a kind of nutcracker especially for cracking the betel nut) she had for offering him betel to chew. Then she said, "*Hum Hindu log bhagvan ko bahut lad ladate hain na*—we Hindus like to indulge the gods." This statement gathers in itself the richness of a compact metaphor that gathers meaning from different domains, for it is only because she has learned to indulge the child that she can find a way of relating to the god himself. In the miniature objects that women use to worship and in bathing, feeding, and singing to icons, they may not realize that they are engaged in play, but in fact they are reproducing the modality of play in their worship. In this sense we find a transformation of the adult world in the substitution of contents of the world children create and retain through play. The special community of women and children to which I referred several times is again witnessed in these transformations.

Let me point to another example in which the world of the child becomes a model for the world of the adult—the celebration of the entire Krishna motif in the devotional cults of Hinduism. In an excellent study in history of Vaisnava aesthetics, David Haberman[14] has shown how the figure of the kingly Krishna was transformed during the rise of Muslim kingship in the medieval period into the figure of the child Krishna. Haberman thinks that this transformation was vital to the reorganization of the world, which was required in the period when the focus of power shifted from Hindu to Muslim kings. It is the mischief and trickery of the child Krishna that became celebrated in the forms of devotion that evolved in Braja in this period—a place which according to Srivats Goswami, the head of the Chaitanya Malha in Vrindavana—became like the still center of a storm. In much of medieval poetry we find the same joking relationship between gods and men that we characterized as peculiar to the world of the child.

The world of children and the world of adults meet on many points. They have a kind of floating relationship which cannot be described through analogy or polarity alone. Children's play reproduces the world of adults in some contexts and transforms it in others. Having examined this relationship in the context of language, storytelling, and the recitation of rhymes in the everyday life of the child, we now turn to the domain of play and games.

THE DOMAIN OF PLAY

Many cultural artifacts meant for the child produce the adult world on a miniaturized register and may be seen to take the perspective of the child. Yet, as Roland Barthes pointed out in a beautiful paper on children's toys, the world is given to the child in a finished state[15] as all adult activities are reproduced on a kind of child register. Even in the case of such toys as He-Man, Sceptron, and Battle Tanks, which may not reproduce the everyday reality as little doll houses with miniaturized vacuum cleaners do, it is the elements of fantasy of the adult world that are reproduced. How do children incorporate toys in their play? Do children reproduce adult reality or do they transform it?

The children in the families I studied did not have many toys. This was as true for the middle-class children among the Punjabi families as for the children who lived in slums. There was, however, a striking difference in the legitimacy accorded to children's play in these two communities. Unlike children in the middle class, children in the slums reflected the dark and sometimes macabre reality of the life of the community in their play and often had to play their games in defiance of adults.

In both communities, little girls possessed one or two dolls. Many had miniaturized vessels and crockery. Cooking imaginary food was a favorite pastime of girls. Girls of up to ten or eleven years of age had miniaturized icons of their favorite gods or goddesses and a good deal of time was spent in playing with them. Little boys had balls and bats for games. A toy gun was another favorite object. Toys were often given to children as gifts from relatives. If expensive, the toys were likely to be locked away in showcases, which most families had in their drawing rooms. Toys were also acquired during visits to pilgrimage centers or to fairs and festivals. Toys were markers of the places visited, for each place specializes in certain kinds of artifacts for children. Toys often captured images of other places and times or of extraordinary events rather than being duplications of the everyday reality of the child.

The significance of play lies in the fact that it enables the child to take the voice of the other. It is when the child learns to assume the viewpoint of other people through role playing, according to G. H. Mead, to whom we owe our understanding of self-as-symbol, that we can see the emergence of sociality as well as the genesis of the self through division of labor.[16] The significance of games for the moral development of the child is also underscored by Piaget,[17] but he seems to give insufficient recognition to the constitutive importance of the child's interpersonal relations and capacity for developing his moral and cognitive abilities.[18] The first question that we have to ask about play, then, is what relations it bears to the environment of the child. Let me again proceed by example.

Among the girls in the middle-class families that I studied, the favorite form of play through which everyday life was captured was imaginary cooking. Two or more girls would set up their little kitchens and proceed to mime all the activities of their mothers—sending someone to buy vegetables, lighting the stove, cooking the day's meals. The play always included miming the behavior of the adults. Servants were constantly scolded for cheating and husbands for bringing stale vegetables back from the market. Adults could be suddenly included in the play by being offered something that had been cooked. The children expected praise for their efforts and were frequently rewarded with exclamations of delight. The behavior encountered in everyday life was mapped onto play. The children were taking roles and learning to represent the "other" as he or she is concretely encountered. What needs to be emphasized in this context is that children do not represent only the concrete other in their play but also try to represent what they see as the future. It is the relation of the play to the future that marked some of the most important differences in the play of these children.

One of the favorite games of girls from the age of seven to almost thirteen was the arrangement of the doll's wedding. This could be played with varying degrees of elaboration. Sometimes the doll's marriage was a small affair. At other times, far less frequent, it would involve not only the girls but also their mothers.

One mother stitched some small clothes for the "bride" with shining tinsel and bought miniature ornaments for the doll. The doll was also provided a "dowry" and on the day of the "wedding" the mother cooked small *puris* (a form of bread) and some vegetables to feed the groom's party. The little girl who was the "mother" of the bride complained about the expense and requested "the groom's mother" to look after her daughter, who at the conclusion of the ceremony was duly sent to the house of the groom and spent a good two hours there before being reclaimed at the conclusion of the play.

It was evident to me when I heard the children talk (I was a guest at the wedding) that the girls were not only imitating the behavior of the adults but that these were events they expected to have happen in their own lives. The participation of the mother and of some of the other women in the neighborhood created a community of play between the girls and the women. The roles taken in this play represented events that the children had witnessed as well as events that were likely to happen in the life of each of the girls. The adults derived amusement from this "charming" portrayal, and the children were reaffirmed in their sense of worth.

I never witnessed such play among the children in Sultanpuri, but during a summer camp we conducted with the children I found that one of the favorite songs of the girls was about the wedding of a doll. This is how one of the twelve-year-old girls described the doll's wedding scenario to me: "First the father of the girl goes to fix up the marriage. Then the *baratis* [members of the the groom's party] come. The ritual of *pheras* [circumambulation] is completed. The doll goes away to her husband's house. All the women cry. Then the doll becomes *parayi* [belonging to someone else]."

I was struck by the fact that although she presented the same sequence of events as the other little girls had celebrated, there was a kind of alienation in her way of speaking, especially in her last sentence: "the doll becomes parayi," which had the ring of having been taken from someone else's speech. In Sultanpuri girls get married or at least engaged by the time they are fifteen or sixteen.

They become sexually aware somewhat earlier, for they understand the risks of being sold off or lured into prostitution. They also see women being beaten up and abused by drunken husbands. Was she, then, playing out the images she had received from the televising of Hindi films, in which the scenes of wedding and the presentation of the bride are predominant even in advertisements? I had a strong intuition that this was so, but perhaps I can best portray it by contrasting it with the kind of play that the girls of Sultanpuri simultaneously created.

Here is one of their favorite games: a group of girls surrounds two girls at the center. They occupy two different parts of the center. One girl pretends to be cooking chapatis. Then she says to the other girl, "Oh, ma, I want to pee. I'd better go." She wraps the chapatis, puts them in a corner and goes. The other girl makes an elaborate structure of "seeing," and says to herself, "Ah she is not there—I can go and get her chapatis." She steals them. The first girl returns, finds her chapatis missing, goes over to the other corner, and engages the other girl in a fight. The group sitting around says in chorus, "ye mara, vo mara—hitting here and hitting there."

Two other girls come onto the scene. One says to one of the girls engaged in the fight, "Why did you hit my daughter-in-law?" The other responds, "Why did she hit me?" and the two newcomers also engage in fighting. Then they are joined by "husbands," "sons," and various other "relatives" till everyone is engaged in fights and scuffles, with "ye mara, vo mara" providing the appropriate musical background.

The authenticity and simultaneous engagement of everyone in this game contrasts with the wedding play of the same girls, for it seems to be something they create out of alien images. Such images are also evident when the girls sing songs taught to them in school or draw the standard pictures of the national flag, which they were taught about in art classes. For example, in one song they describe how flowers rained from heaven when Mahatma Gandhi was born and how the whole universe wept when he was shot dead. When I asked one of them why heaven had rained flowers and why the universe had wept, she replied in a flat tone that this was because Gandhiji had been born and then he had died. Often the images the children had learned to produce revealed their alien origin by tone of voice, rigidity of gesture, and a standardized speech that I came to characterize as "school speech."[19]

In contrast, when engaged in spontaneous play the children could create and transform everyday objects into fantastic ones. It was as if the inner beings of objects only revealed themselves to their eyes and the world of objects was infinitely transformable for them. Thus, chairs could become trains, pillows could become disguised monsters, ladles could well be spearheads. Adults tend to fix objects as having this or that function, children as having inner beings that take the external shape of chairs and ladles. It is only in traditional theater or performance that we find such transformations. Anuradha Kapur describes it thus for the Ramalila:

> A chair in traditional Indian drama may represent a chair, a mountain, a chariot, a throne; a pond may represent the sea; and a boy an icon. There are no fixed representational limits; things can stand for each other, and the same thing can denote several things depending on its context within which it is placed. Now this is not obviously possible in naturalist theater. When a table is to be shown, a man on all fours will not suffice.[20]

It is this fluidity of objects and of persons in both performance and play that allows one to say with Anuradha Kapur of both theater and play that "if one is to ask, even at the cost of oversimplification, what theater at its best hopes to achieve, it may be possible to answer, in the same spirit, that it hopes to make the *possible* present."[21]

This creativity was present in the slums as well as the middle-class families, but the most important difference was that the games in the slums seemed to lack any legitimacy in relation to the adults. The children in the slums were well aware of this lack, as this example will show. A number of children were sitting at the corner of a street and gambling with the help of pebbles and match sticks. The rules seemed clear enough to them. "What would happen if someone were to lose all that money?" we asked a ten-year-old. "Oh," he replied casually, "if you are an adult you get drunk, go home, and beat up your wife. If you are a child you get beaten up."

The girls who were representing the adult world to themselves through their imitation of cooking were engaged in a construction of everyday reality that was considered legitimate. Even if their behavior sometimes bordered on the subversive, it was greeted by laughter.

The boys in Sultanpuri and Tilakvihar had to constantly deal with the fact that their lives, including the lives of the adults of their community, were steeped in modes of behavior that they did not themselves consider legitimate. Men who are humiliated everyday in the streets of Delhi get drunk by the evening and beat up their wives. The games of the children represent the precariousness of the worlds that they and their elders create.

Two years after the riots had taken place in Trilokpuri, one of the areas which was the scene of a ghastly carnage during the riots, a journalist visited the area. He found children playacting the riots. A group of children would catch hold of one, and amidst shouts of "burn him," "kill him," would pretend to put a tie around his neck and burn him to death. The children included not only those whose parents had been victims but also those who had been witness to the carnage. In the developmental logic of the self, G. H. Mead has argued, one must be able to put oneself in the place of the other, and finally a generalized other will emerge when one can reconstruct the structuralist nexus, which in addition to others contains oneself and one's perspective.[22]

But what if the construction of this structuralist nexus essentially involves an understanding of a world that is not ordered and regulated? What if this world is a nightmare in which one day one shall simply see one's world go up in flames? What if understanding this structuralist nexus involves an understanding of the terror to which a child was submitted while watching a house burn in which were locked her father and three brothers? The children could take the role of the concrete others in their play and act out some parts of the annihilation of their lives.

As I shall show in the concluding section, they tried to grasp the nature of such a dark world by moving out of their immediate social environment and taking recourse to the mythical. It does not seem to me that we understand how it becomes possible to reconcile the different "me's" into a unitary "I" under the circumstances. What seemed to be clear to the children was that the world was a violently unpredictable place and their games tried to represent the rules of such disorder. Thus, one could say that they did acquire a cognitive understanding of their situation. The comprehension of the world that they acquired was that one did not go by the stated rules, for the preservation of the self depended on knowing how to avoid adult aggression, how to answer questions of visiting bureaucrats so as to conceal certain truths, and how to avoid sexual aggression of certain known pimps. Just as they created games that mirrored the dark and macabre reality of their lives, so they learned that the underlying rules of the game are quite different from the stated rules. This is what Harré, the social psychologist and philosopher, means when he talks of "rules" of disorder.[23]

I do not mean to say that these children did not enjoy play and games. As many of those students from the university who had worked with them learned, it was possible to create small spaces and enclosures of times in which the children could engage in normal playful activities such as making clay toys or cutting and pasting pictures.[24] But these were not their own creations. These were simply gifts that came their way, gifts that they loved but that they had no means of integrating into their normal lives.

In his history of play and games, Phillipe Ariès argues that a certain evolution takes place with "repetitious monotony."[25] At first the same games were common to all ages and classes. Slowly some became the monopoly of the other classes while the others were abandoned to members of the lower classes and to children. This relation between class and childhood that he senses in Western societies is important to bear in mind while we contrast it with the kind of descriptions that we have presented here, for childhood is not only a stage of life; it is a modality of being. More than the similarity between lower classes and children, what impresses me is how different the nature of childhood is in each different class of society. A closer glimpse of this difference is offered in the next section.

CHILDREN OF CRISIS

I would like to devote this section completely to the children of Sultanpuri and Tilakvihar. In 1984 they were submitted to four days of terror in the anti-Sikh riots following the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, when crowds from the neighboring streets went around killing and looting. The children were subjected to annihilating violence; yet they managed to recreate their world by constructing coherent narratives about this violence from fragments of myths, stories, and news. Their narratives are the most moving examples I can offer of the collective creativity they displayed in the face of events that might have completely extinguished their selves.

My relations with these children was framed in two different contexts. First was the context of the community when they were camping in the parks or streets along with the surviving members of their families, right after the riots, too terrified to enter their homes. The second context was that of a summer camp we had organized, in which we worked with them outside the context of the community.[26] What does such violence do to a child?

In the community scores of children and adults followed us around, but we rarely got an opportunity to hear the children. It was not that the adults were not concerned about the grief and terror of the children; it was simply that the children were addressed only as characters in the lives of adults. My attention was drawn to them forcibly one day when I heard a number of them quarreling. "They came to my house first," shouted one of them. "No, no, they came to our house first," several others responded. The children were discussing the crowds as if they were engaged in a competitive struggle for status to be determined by whose relatives had been killed first.

It was in the summer camp that it became possible to locate the children's own voices in the narration of this annihilating violence. One of the children in our group was Avatar—an eleven-year-old who had a severely damaged ear drum and was described as a deaf mute. One day as I was taking the children in a van to the site of the summer camp from their homes, Avatar became very excited. His shoulders were heaving and he was giving the impression of jumping up and down, although he was not moving at all. He forced my attention toward a tree by holding my chin and turning it in that direction. I asked what that tree was. Avatar mimed the following scene. His hands gripped an imaginary object and started to drag it. His face showed the resistance and the struggle of a person who was being dragged against his will to a terrible fate. He then stretched his hands, as if over an imaginary rope, and made a lasso of it. The lasso was sprung to catch the branch of the tree, and on the other side of the hanging rope, an imaginary noose was made. His face became that of a person around whose neck the noose had been slipped and was tightening. Then his head slumped forward and his face was that of a dead man. One of the children said that the tree was the one from which Avatar's father had been hung. It seemed to me that his body was a theater, his hands and face engaged in a conversation of gestures. Thus was memory embodied.

It often seemed to me that there was a division of labor in remembrance, as if the children who had been numbed and could not speak depended on the others to give them a voice. Balloo, perhaps five years old, never spoke. But whenever our van passed a particular spot in the locality the children would say, "That is where Balloo's father was burned alive." The crowd, it seems, had left the father after a while and though no adult had dared go to him, Balloo had run there and had held her father's hand throughout the last moments of his agony. Balloo would vehemently nod her head in affirmation, but she could never be persuaded to speak of it herself.

Many of the children would find ways of speaking about the dead by projecting them as ghosts. Harjit, a thirteen-year-old, told us that his father would appear to him as a ghost. "He seems very angry," Harjit would say. "Why was he angry?" I would ask. "Oh, for many things. Not going to school, troubling my mother, and not avenging his death."

The child most frequently disturbed in her sleep by the thought that her mother appeared as a ghost was thirteen-year-old Babli. Her mother had hung herself from the ceiling of their house several months after her husband and three sons had been burned alive in the house in which they had tried to hide. Babli blamed herself for what had happened. She had been among the women who were hiding on the terrace of a nearby house and watching the crowds, which had surrounded the house where her father and brothers were hiding. As the crowd threw challenges to Babli's father to come out and face them, Babli had watched in helpless silence. At one stage, perhaps goaded by her mother, she had run into the crowd wanting to draw their attention to the fact that her baby brother was also locked in the house. "Uncle Ji, Uncle Ji," she shouted, recognizing some neighbors in the crowd, "my little brother is in the house." The crowd did not hear her. By the time someone did, the house had already been doused with kerosene and lighted. However, one person turned angrily to her and said, "Why did you not tell us before that your baby brother was in it? Do you think we are the killers of children?"

I do not have the space to describe the complexity of this statement, but there was a kind of implicit contract by which everyone knew that only adult men would be killed. Hence, Babli's mother had blamed herself for not having understood the nature of this contract and some of this anger and guilt had been projected onto Babli. While the mother was alive, she had accused Babli of not saving her brother. Whenever Babli had tried to go near her mother, she had hit Babli. Now, though the mother was dead, she still seemed angry. As Babli said, "She comes in my nightmares and she always seems angry."

While the children picked up fragments of stories about ghosts from the adults' talk about the dead, they transformed these into their own images. The adults often referred to the fate of the dead, who, they feared, would have no peace, for they had been burned alive and the bodies had not been handed over to the relatives. How could the dead have peace, they asked, when the last rites had not been performed? Ghosts thus constituted a general category for the adults, who were articulating the collective belief that those who have died violent deaths need special rituals of placation because otherwise they will continue to haunt the living.

For the children, on the other hand, the ghosts of the dead took on particular personalities. They haunted the children in their sleep, terrified them with demands, and held them guilty. As gods and goddesses are given a very different form in the children's rhymes, here we see how the dark forces of the sacred are individualized in the form of the voices of dead parents who do not allow the children to forget.

In conceptualizing the situation, the children took frequent recourse to the mythic. They had obviously picked up fragments of conversations among the adults, pieced together various interpretations heard in the local *gurudwaras* (houses of the gurus—for example, Sikh temples) which had acquired a new legitimacy in their eyes, and put their own interpretations on what they heard on radio or television. The following examples show the transformation of these fragments into coherent narratives in the imagination of the children.

One day as the children and I were coming into camp, Avatar excitedly pointed to a poster displaying a hand—the election symbol of the Congress party. He looked at me expectantly, waiting for me to provide the corresponding text. "That is a hand," I said. He nodded, yes. "It is the symbol of the Congress party," I continued. He shook his head in vehement denial. Puzzled, I said, "Is it not the symbol of the Congress party?" He then held up the palm of his own hand and pointed towards the wall with the poster, which had already disappeared as the van moved on. "You are going to tell me what that hand meant?" He gestured yes. Then with his hands he proceeded to mime an episode from the life of Guru Nanak—the founder of Sikhism. One hand brought a boulder toward his head. Next, he mimed the coming of rays of light from the raised hand of the guru. The rays of light forcibly stopped the hand with the boulder. Then he raised his right hand in the traditional gesture of benign protection with which Guru Nanak is usually portrayed. For a moment, Avatar's body became the iconic representation of Guru Nanak.

Avatar raised his hand again and pointed outside where he had first spotted the poster with the hand on it. Now he was going to tell me the story of the Congress hand. A vicious, murderous look came onto his face. Both hands became a flurry of movement—killing, dousing people with kerosene, and burning them alive. The hands and face were again a conversation of gestures in which the hands portrayed the acts of killing while on his face he portrayed the expressions and the pain of the dying. At the end of this performance, Avatar showed us the protective hand of Guru Nanak signifying protection. At once he switched to the Congress hand and mimed the brutalities to which it had subjected them during the riots. Thus, although it was the local-level leaders of the Congress party who had been seen as guiding and abetting violent crowds, the symbol of the Congress party (the hand) came to signify, for the child, the connivance of the whole party.

Long verbal accounts of their feelings were never volunteered by the children. But as Avatar's case shows so dramatically, their bodies had become repositories of knowledge, a method of encoding memory. Women also showed the marks of injury incurred during the riots. For instance, an old woman who had lost her son in those fateful days used to go around with a bandage on a healed scar. She would insist that the wound gave her excruciating pain whenever she thought of her son. I hardly ever heard a man or a woman explain the riots with mythological references, although the sermons in the gurudwaras did connect these events with the long history of persecution of the Sikhs. For the victims, however, the genealogy of the events lay in the immediately preceding events—histories of local conflicts between the Sikhs and the Chamars, the assassination of Mrs. Gandhi, the growth of terrorism in the Punjab. It was the children who gave experiential reality to the stories they had heard of the mythical past.

The violence of the riots had changed the nature of the world for the children. They were no strangers to violence. Sometimes a child would lift up his shirt and show the injury inflicted by a drunken father, an angry schoolmaster, or an irate employer. It was as if the body was a picture of the wounds incurred by the child in dealing with adult aggression in daily life. The children had also witnessed gang fights and seen individual murders. They could identify the drug peddlers and the hired killers who lived in their slums.

This was, however, violence they could assimilate in the everyday structure of their lives. What was different about the violence in the nights of terror to which they had been subjected was that it could not be easily assimilated in the sense of family and community structure that they had acquired through daily living. Perhaps because they could not assimilate this violence they sought the mythical so frequently and reacted so emotionally to every new incidence of violence that they heard about.

One day Hukam, a very gifted child of ten, informed me that he had heard that the prime minister had gone to Russia where his mother had been earlier. There he was going to order that every Sikh be killed, every child among them, for he felt he had to avenge the death of his mother. No amount of reassurance that this was not the case could quiet his fears. There were other occasions when even minimum reassurance was not possible. When some terrorists planted bombs in buses in Delhi and several people were injured, the whole community was terror stricken that they would be attacked. A little boy of eleven ran to his mother and asked her to dress him in girl's clothes so that he could escape the assassins. He had understood the structural nexus that constitutes the generalized other in which his perspective was one of the perspectives among others.

In his prodigious studies of the moral lives of children, Robert Coles makes a remark that sums up much better than I can the perplexity that invades one's being as one reflects on such exemplary courage displayed by such children. Perhaps I may therefore be permitted to quote his remarks:

> The reader will, no doubt, sense in this first chapter evidence of struggle in the author: strong respect for the work of Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg, Carol Gilligan, and yet perplexity that sometimes slides into pique as I compare their ideas about "moral development" with the thoroughly complicated matter of moral (and yes, spiritual) *behavior* in children, and will notice irony, at the very least. How do children prove themselves capable of such brave, exemplary acts—and could the wisest, most morally sensitive and subtle philosopher or clergyman or social scientist or physician ever be able to muster up similar responses under the same fearful, if not murderous circumstances?[27]

I would plead that there is exemplary courage in the children affected by the riots, and, like Coles, I have often wondered how such children could have the courage to go on living, conning the school teacher, fighting to win a game, gambling with match sticks, and producing that subversive laughter that made many a visiting dignitary feel that the children were not disciplined enough. If it is true that as a person I come to know who I am only in the objectification of my activity and my social intercourse, then surely Coles's insistence that we understand moral behavior and not study only disembodied forms of thought is an insistence that we must heed in all seriousness.

DOORWAYS TO CHILDHOOD

In his essay on toys, Roland Barthes states that French toys are like jivaro heads, in which one recognizes, shrunken to the size of apples, the wrinkles and hair of adults. There is such a temptation for adults to find themselves reflected in the play and fantasy of children. Yet I have found that children create social worlds of their own which are impenetrable to adults. This was clearest to me in the children of the slums, and it was only the contingent factor of my presence at some highly charged emotional moments that showed me the neighborhood of the world of children. In the normal course of events, I might have remained an alien to that world.

The sharp distinction between adulthood and childhood, however, is softened in the case of the community of women and children. I have tried to show that in the folk imagination, it is always the woman's voice that creates a world for the child, which will always remain tangential to the world of men. This community of women and children reflected in storytelling, play, the rituals of feeding and bathing is strongest when the child is completely dependent on the mother—but memories of it remain even when children begin to create separate worlds through play and games. The modality of regret with which the mother hands over the world to the child sets the tone of their relationship and keeps certain doorways to childhood open to women.

ENDNOTES

I am grateful to Ranendra Das for his unstinting help and to the participants in the conference for this special issue of *Dædalus* for their critical comments. This paper is a small gift for Sanmay for the treasures he has generously shared with me.

[1] Some aspects of this have been reported in earlier papers of mine. See especially "Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship," in *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (new series) (Delhi: Viking, 1977), and "Femininity and the Orientation to the Body," in *Women, Socialization and Change*, ed. Karuna Ahmed (Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1988).

[2] I came to know these children in the course of my attempts to rehabilitate the victims of anti-Sikh riots in Delhi in 1984.

[3] Quoted in Robert Coles, *The Moral Life of Children* (Boston: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1986), 249. As I want to present the children whom I have known intimately, I cannot present a comprehensive picture of the variations encountered in Indian society.

[4] For a description of these approaches, see Rom Harré, "The Step to Social Constructionism," in *Children of Social Worlds*, ed. Martin Richards and Paul Light (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986).

[5] See Rajendra Prasad Pradhan, "Domestic and Cosmic Rituals among the Newars of Nepal," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of New Delhi, 1987.

[6] For the concept of everyday life, see Agnes Heller, *Everyday Life* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984).

[7] See Elinor Ochs and Bambi B. Schiefelin, "Language Acquisition and Socialization: Three Developmental Stories and their Implications," in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self, and Emotion*, ed. Richard A. Schweder and Robert A. Levine (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984).

[8] Ibid.

[9] See Veena Das, "Masks and Faces: An Essay on Punjabi Kinship."

[10] In the case of Europe, Phillipe Ariès traces the emergence of the literary fairytale from the folktale at the end of the seventeenth century. Jack Zibes has captured the difference between the folktale and the fairytale by showing that power and exploitation were the key concerns of the folktale, whereas moral edification and setting the standards of *civility* were the major concerns of the fairytale. See Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, trans.

Robert Baldick (New York: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1962) and Jack Zibes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Wildman Press, 1983).

[11] Tanika Sarkar has pointed out to me that compilations of such rhymes were made during the *swadeshi* movement in Bengal in an effort to create an indigenous children's literature. While there is no doubt that these rhymes have their base in the folk imagination, it is possible that they may have been somewhat sweetened in the context of the new ideas about childhood that were emerging in this period. I thank Sumit Sarkar and Tanika Sarkar for their help in formulating some of the issues here.

[12] See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 496.

[13] Phillipe Ariès, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1962).

[14] See David Haberman, "The Aesthetics of Krishna in Roop Goswami," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1980.

[15] See Roland Barthes, "Toys," in *Mythologies* (New York: Jonathan Cape, 1972).

[16] See G. H. Mead, *Mind, Self, and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1934).

[17] Jean Piaget, *The Moral Judgment of the Child* (New York: Free Press, 1965).

[18] This criticism has also been made of Lawrence Kohlberg's notion of the stages of moral development when they are considered autonomous developments. See Lawrence Kohlberg, *The Philosophy of Moral Development* (New York: Harper and Row, 1981).

[19] Mala Kapur describes a similar phenomenon in her study of moral development of children in a village near Delhi. She says that a consequence of rote learning in school was a kind of speech that children used in reciting school lessons and refers to it as "speech of the lesson." I would not agree that this is simply a consequence of rote learning, for it refers to the wider phenomenon of taking on alien images, yet signaling their alienness by tone, gesture, repetition, and so on. See Mala Kapur, "The Moral Education of the Child," unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delhi, 1985.

[20] See Anuradha Kapur, "Actors, Pilgrims, Kings, and Gods: The Ramalila at Ramnagar," in *The Word and the World: Fantasy, Symbol, and Record*, ed. Veena Das (New Delhi: Sage Publication, 1986).

[21] Ibid.

[22] See Mead.

[23] Rom Harré, *Personal Being* (London: Oxford University Press, 1982).

[24] I refer to a group of university students led by Dr. Mita Bose that has been consistently working with the children since the riots. On a small report of this work, see Veena Das and Mita Bose, "The Legacy of Despair," in *Illustrated Weekly of India* (Bombay, 1–7 February 1987): 32–33.

[25] Ariès.

[26] I would like to thank the Indian Express Relief Committee, which not only provided the funds but also the moral support for holding this camp. I would like to pay my respectful tribute to Mita Bose and other volunteers from colleges and schools who worked in the camp.

[27] Coles.

SIXTEEN MODERN INDIAN POEMS

Selected and edited by
A. K. Ramanujan and Vinay Dharwadker

THIS IS A SMALL ANTHOLOGY OF POEMS by sixteen modern Indian poets writing in eleven major languages, including English. Seven of the languages are Indo-Aryan: Bengali and Oriya are spoken in the east; Hindi, Urdu, and Punjabi, mainly in the north; and Gujarati and Marathi in western and central India. Three of them—Kannada, Tamil, and Malayalam—belong to the Dravidian family of languages spoken in the south.

The oldest poet included here was born early in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, the youngest a few years before India's independence in 1947. The earliest poem, Bharati's "Wind," was probably written during the First World War, and the most recent, in the present decade. Our selection thus represents a period of about seventy-five years and at least three generations of modern Indian poets. It also includes three important contemporary women writers—Nabaneeta Dev Sen, Indira Sant, and Amrita Pritam.

Six of these poems are relatively long and belong to the narrative, dramatic, meditative, and didactic modes. The rest are various types of lyrics—descriptive poems, personal love poems, surreal poems, poems of fantasy and of realism, historical, political, and satiric poems. They have been carried over into English by thirteen translators working independently or in collaboration during the past twenty years, including two North American scholars and three Indians who live in North America.

The sixteen poems presented here are drawn from *One Hundred Modern Indian Poems*, an anthology edited by Vinay Dharwadkar and A. K. Ramanujan, forthcoming from Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

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English

Nissim Ezekiel (1924-   )

In India, 1

Always, in the sun's eye,
Here among the beggars,
Hawkers, pavement sleepers,
Hutment dwellers, slums,
Dead souls of men and gods,
Burned-out mothers, frightened
Virgins, wasted child
And tortured animal,
All in noisy silence
Suffering the place and time,
I ride my elephant of thought,
A Cézanne slung round my neck.

Bengali

Jibanananda Das (1899-1954)

In Camp

Here, on the forest's edge, I have pitched camp.
All night long, in the pleasant southern breezes,
in the light of the moon in the sky,
I hear the call of the doe in heat—
whom is she calling?

Somewhere tonight the deer are being hunted.
The hunters came to the forest today—
I too catch their scent
as I lie here on my campbed,
wide awake
on this spring night.

The wonder of the forest is everywhere,
an April breeze,
like the taste of the moon's rays.
All night long the doe calls in heat.
Deep in the forest somewhere, in places the moonlight
  does not reach,
all the stags hear her call;
they sense her presence,
they move towards her.
Tonight, on this night of wonder,
their time for love has come.
The sister of their hearts calls them through the moonlight
from their forest cover
to quench their thirst, by smell, by taste.
Tonight, as if the forest were free of tigers,
no sharp fear, not even a shadow of doubt,

fills the heart of those deer—
only thirst,
excitement.
Perhaps wonder awakens even in the cheetah's breast
at the beauty of the doe's face.
Tonight, on this night of spring,
lust, longing, love, desire, dreams burst all around.
This is my "nocturne."

The deer come, one by one, leaving the dense
forest trails,
leaving behind the sounds of water in search of a different
assurance;
forgetting tooth and claw, they come there in the moonlight
to their sister under the *sundari* tree.
Those deer come like a man who draws near his salty woman
lured by her scent.
I sense them,
I hear the sound of numerous hooves,
the doe in heat is calling through the moonlight.
I cannot sleep.
As I lie here,
I hear gunshots.
Once more I hear the sound of guns.
Once more the doe in heat calls in the moonlight
as I lie here fallen, alone;
a weariness swells my heart
as I listen to the sound of guns
as I hear the doe call.

She will come back tomorrow.
We will see her by daylight in the morning
with all her lovers lying dead around her.
She has learned all this from men.

I will smell venison on my dinner plate.
Hasn't the eating of flesh come to an end?
But why should it end?
Why should I be pained at the thought of those deer—
am I not like them?
On a spring night,
on one of life's wondrous nights,

did someone not come into the moonlight and call me too—
in the pleasant southern breezes,
like that doe in heat?
Has not my heart, a stag,
wanted to hold you with all caution thrown aside,
forgetting all the violence of this world,
forgetting the fear of the cheetah's gaze?
When the love in my heart
lay smeared with blood and dust, like those dead deer,
did you not live on like that doe
through life's wondrous night
one night in spring?

Even you have learned it from someone.
We too lie here with our flesh like the flesh of dead beasts.
Like those dead deer
everyone comes, then falls
in the face of separation and death.
By living, loving, longing for love,
we are hurt, we are embittered, we die,
do we not?

I hear the report of a double-barreled gun.
The doe in heat has called.
My heart cannot sleep
as I lie here alone.
Yet I must forget the sound of those guns.
Night talks about other things on campbeds,
of them whose double-barreled guns killed the deer tonight,
on whose dinner plates satisfaction was served,
the taste of deer flesh and bone.
They too are like you.
Their hearts too are withering away on their campbeds,
thinking, just thinking.

This pain, this love, is everywhere,
in the locust, in the worm, in the breasts of men,
in all our lives.
We are all
like those slain deer in spring moonlight.

Translated from Bengali by Clinton B. Seely

Nabaneeta Dev Sen (1938-)

the yellow river

the great wall of china
rises inside
blocking stars .
woods ricefields

the great wall of china rises within
blocking all

yet
the yellow river
sweeps away village
after village

Translated from Bengali by the poet

Gujarati

Sitanshu Yashashchandra (1941-   )

Drought

For nearly a month
the tortoise has been lying there,
stony as an adam's apple.
Terraces, like the tongues of flaming caves,
lie empty at noon.
From the gaping doors,
black tar drips like thick saliva.

Mother told us
that after the tortoises
there would be fish in the well,
that we should watch it intently with the torch—
you can't let the well dry up in this terrible famine.
For who knows,
the wall of this mysterious cave
might open up,
and in the halo of this light
fish, crocodile, hippopotamus
and, what mother didn't know, even sea horses
might come flying from the wall
into the baffled eye of the torch.

Who knows who inscribed
a sea horse on this cave wall?
It has been there for years, decades, centuries,
flying in the water.

And in this terrible drought,
as the well goes on opening deeper
and deeper downwards,
the horses in the ghostly cave walls
begin to neigh bucketfuls,
and the sprightly cheetahs.
Now you experience such a bottomless fear
when you're thirsty,
while tying the master knot to let the rope down,
that you recall the story of Sadevant Savalinga,
in which the bewitching knot of night
suddenly undoes itself;
and as you haul wet rope over slippery pulley
bucketfuls of blind, upturned, twitching, gentle bats
come tumbling out of this dark, obscure,
hollow, phantom cave.

In this unforeseen time of drought
blank sky and fever-hot directionless space
slip away into the unfound routes of terraces.
In the deep recesses of the cave,
in this desolate noon,
the cheetahs and fish who have slept
for centuries might come awake in the wall.
The throat is parched and the mouth is burning with fever.
But one has lost the nerve to lower
another bucket into the well.
As tired hands let the rope slip,
the bucket falls to the bottom.
And when the cat hook is lowered to retrieve it,
the sprightly cheetahs hiss out in a pack.
You feel ashamed to turn the torch on them, and yet—
should you or shouldn't you pull up the cat hook?
You wonder if in this unexpected season of drought
these iron cats of drag hooks have given birth
to golden kittens in these dark hollows,
in the secret well of doubt.

Though the mud plaster is cracked
and is peeling off in the dryness,
and the well is an awful place to inhabit,
what would you do if worms and insects

crawled out of the cracks?
Under the hot curved metal faucet,
water trickles into the bucket,
but it dries up after a few drops.
Who will daub and restore
this constantly cracking mud wall?
And yet—

What is thirst?
As if dragged from the throat at night,
it lay crumpled, a late-morning bedsheet,
on dust-coated brows;
thirst pushed itself into the nostrils;
raw thirst sat on parched lips;
this high thirst passed through,
forcing itself deep into the gullet,
then gushed out from the navel.
The water in the well must be exhausted by now
from creating mirages of tortoises and fish,
followed by whales and other ghosts.

And yet it is not.
I remember mother saying
that if this well goes dry—
no, she really said that,
these are no folktales about sea horses and cheetahs—
if this well goes dry,
perhaps within a month in this terrible drought,
the inside, the wall, the bottom
will overflow with innumerable ants
and a wellful of ants will swell and spill over.
A million ants from the foundations of this house
will cover the rooms and yawning terraces like tongues,
and on slippery pulleys with long ropes hanging everywhere,
ants and ants and ants, ants and ants
and ants, ants, ants, and nothing but ants.

Translated from Gujarati by Saleem Peeradina, Jayant Parekh,
Rasik Shah, and Gulam Mohammed Sheikh

Hindi

Raghuvir Sahay (1929-)

Our Hindi

Our Hindi is a widower's new wife
she talks too much eats too much sleeps too much

Go on making ornaments for her
keep giving her a swollen head

Let her grow fat let her smell of sweat
let her keep smuggling the stuff out to her mother's

Let her burn with envy for her neighbors
let her quarrel over garbage disposal

Of course the question of turning her out of
  the house doesn't arise
everything a woman needs is in the house
a Mahabharata a Ramayana one by Tulsidas and
  one by Radheshyam
the story of the film *Nagin* including the lyrics
  for all its songs
and a Kokshastra printed in Khari Boli

There's a stupid maid for the mess
  of household things
a middle-aged husband to pick on and strip naked
an untended garden several rooms like cells inside
  each other

soiled pillows on the bed crumpled clothes on the chairs
glasses tumbling on the floor
dirty linen on the pegs to be taken and washed at the well

Everything a woman needs is in the house
dankness and five kilograms of gold in the inner room
a child with an enlarged liver
whom she teaches to squat over the monthly magazines
a plot of land on which our Hindi Bhavan will be built

Let the faultfinders say what they will
our Hindi is a married woman she's faithful she's happy
she wants to die before her husband dies
everything's okay but first her husband must survive her
for how else can she have her wish

Translated from Hindi by Vinay Dharwadker

Sarveshwar Dayal Saxena (1927-)

The Black Panther

I

The black panther is sleeping on the crags;
the color of the crags is black.

The black panther
is stretching and yawning on the crags;
the color of the crags is changing.

The black panther
is racing over the crags;
the color of the crags has changed.

The black panther
is mauling his prey on the crags;
the crags are no longer crags;
they've changed into panthers.

A single panther is changing
the whole jungle
into a black panther.

II

In the twilight at dusk,
having killed his prey,
the black panther
drinks water
at the red, stony river.

This river
is his past,
is his present,
is his future.

For centuries,
with this river's help,
the black panther has changed
into the thudding of the black jungle.

Translated from Hindi by Vinay Dharwadker

Kedarnath Singh (1934-)

On Reading a Love Poem

When I'd read that long love poem
I closed the book and asked—
where are the ducks?

I was surprised they were nowhere
even far into the distance

It was in the third line of the poem
or perhaps the fifth
that I first felt
there might be ducks here somewhere

I'd heard the flap flap of their wings
but that might have been my illusion

I don't know for how long
that woman had been standing
in the twelfth line
waiting for a bus

The poem was completely silent
about where she wanted to go
only a little sunshine
sifted from the seventeenth line
was falling on her shoulders

The woman was happy
at least there was nothing in her face to suggest
that by the time she reached the twenty-first line
she'd disappear completely
like every other woman

There were *sakhu* trees
standing where the next line began
the trees were spreading
a strange dread through the poem

Every line that came next
was a deep disturbing fear and doubt
about every subsequent line

If only I'd remembered—
it was in the nineteenth line
that the woman was slicing potatoes

She was slicing
large round brown potatoes
inside the poem
and the poem was growing
more and more silent
more solid

I think it was the smell
of freshly chopped vegetables
that kept the woman alive
for the next several lines

By the time I got to the twenty-second line
I felt that the poem had begun changing its location
like a speeding bullet
it had whizzed over the woman's shoulders
towards the *sakhu* trees

There were no lines after that
there were no more words in the poem
there was only the woman
there were only her shoulders
her back her voice—
there was only the woman
standing whole outside the poem now
and breaking it to pieces

Translated from Hindi by Vinay Dharwadker

Kannada

M. Gopalakrishna Adiga (1918-   )

Do Something, Brother

Do something, brother:
keep doing something, anything;
you musn't be idle.
Pull out this plant, nip this little leaf,
crush that flower.
There's grass,
run a burning brand through it,
burn it like Lanka.
Tiny butterflies, parrots, sparrows—
chase them, catch them,
pluck their wings,
pull out their fur and feather.
There, in the garden,
jasmine and the banana's gold
grow for the wild elephant's feet.
All over the walls
virility's master switches
itch for your fingers;
close your eyes
and pull down twenty of them.
Earth, water, the skies,
they're all your geese with golden eggs:
gouge them out, slash them.
"Do, or die," they say.
Disasters are the test
for your genius's galloping dance:

something must crash every minute.
Brother, act, act at once, do something.
Thought's weights and measures
are all for the past,
for the undying ghostly treasures of the dead.

There's the forest,
cut it clean to the stump,
slit it for your buntings.
You have the axe, the sickle,
the saw, and the knife;
go, harvest all the world
with a flourish of your hand.
But you meet
winter mists, walls of fog,
walls that line the space between face and face,
and the road that sighs and breaks in two
under your eyes,
a couple of mountain peaks that rear their hoods
and lower upon your head,
or lightning winks from sirens
that sing in every tree:
do they plunge you into anxieties
and dilemmas of reason?
No, no, this won't do.
You're a simple man, and that's your strength.
Horse sense and the blinkers
are your forte.

Eat what comes to hand; crush what you touch;
cut the hindering vines.
Mother Earth herself, though tired,
lies open to the skies;
there's still flesh on her bone,
marrow for your hunger.
Come, come, brother,
never forget that you're a man!

Then there's the Well of Life.
Rope the wheel and axle,
pull out all the water.
Reach the last dryness of the rock;

grope, grope with the grappling iron.
"V for Victory," brother.
Break down the atom,
reach for the ultimate world within.
Find God's own arrow
and aim it straight at the heart
of God's own embryo world.
Do something, brother,
do anything.
Idle men
are burdens on the land.
Do something, brother.
Keep doing something all the time
to lighten Mother Earth's loads.
This is right. This is natural.
This is the one thing needful.

Translated from Kannada by A. K. Ramanujan

Chandrashekhara Kambara (1938-)

A Pond Named Ganga

Our village pond named Mother Ganga
stands where the red hill meets the white.
On all three sides grow a million plants,
a seven-walled fort
no man can enter or get out of.
In there, the grunt, growl, and screech
of dogs, foxes, pigs, and parrots
and numberless other creatures.
Each has its share of wind, rain, light, bush,
green, fodder, fear, sleep, and sex.
The trees on the bank have swarms of bats

hanging upside down,
with their broken reflections in the water below.
Generations of flies, fleas, bugs of every kind
breed in endless motion,
in unbroken exchanges of give and take.
The water has nowhere to go.
No great waves rise and fall here
and no cold winds blow,
but the water rustles in the roots of old trees,
swirls in the village gutters,
and in the round white holes of the crabs.

Anytime the east's old carbuncle breaks
and oozes blood and pus,
movement begins here:
babysnake ripples wake, break, roll about,
and the flocks of bats break up into lines,
form sixes and sevens,
circle on their wrinkled wings.

In the muddy mired water,
one-legged herons walk,
pecking and devouring the floating glistening fish.
People begin to come for the water:
to drink, to bathe in, to wash off
their cattle's dung and urine,
to reach our god Birappa's feet,
to bathe our Black Mother Goddess,
to piss and shit,
to wet orthodox widows' weeds,
to get the Brahmins' holy water,
for this, that, and the other.
The water spent this way
runs down the gutters of the village
and comes back to the pond.
This daily round of commerce
is its specialty.

This water too has its Ganges Hymns,
its Hundred Names, its Thousand Names,
its place legends,
braided by the village Brahmins

like their own tufts.
It's the grease from the old god's matted hair,
it's the green shit from the sage's thighs,
it's Mother Ganga herself who has stayed here
to wash the dirt from her ears.
When she came,
she came with a dowry in her lap,
the holy germs from the mud and sand of her country,
the fear that ropes are snakes,
the magic mirror held up to seeing eyes.

The Mother's powers are miraculous.
A copper coin turns green
the moment you dip it in this water.
Burnish it, and she deludes you
with impressions of gold.
She's the one who gave the sorceress of Bengal
a pregnant woman's dead hand for a wand.
Three gulps of her water
give barren women firm embryos.
She has taken whole schoolchildren,
bikes and all, into her maw.
And she is the one who possessed
the untouchable woman
and said in her voice, "Yes, O yes!"
when the padre claimed,
"This is the water on which Jesus walked."

Its depth is the bottom of the
   bottomless depth,
world below netherworld below worlds below,
not mud and pebble.
Anyone who says it is,
will have worms swarming in his mouth.
Four or five of our townsmen got down there,
and slept (they say) with serpent princesses—
they're now gods in stone, stories in ballads,
and they get worshipped on full-moon and festival days.
People say the glittering fish
that guzzle on pearls and diamonds
can't digest them, and so float dead.

So, too, night and day,
people become one-legged herons
and ooze like saliva from the herons' beaks.

It's now the place for bastard children,
   the Karnas,
and for the cowards who can't accept them.
This is true. There are such men,
who have no burials, no claim on funeral fires.
They float on the water for three days and nights,
and then our Mother Ganga opens her eyes.
Then the bodies of these men
go to the water creatures,
their souls to the trees
to become hanging bats.
They join the Mother's private police force
and guard her pearls and diamonds.

It's true there's no evidence
for any of these claims
in the Brahmins' books or the shepherds' songs.
But the Brahmin did say so once
in a trance.

Translated from Kannada by A. K. Ramanujan

Malayalam

G. Shankara Kurup (1901-1977)

The Master Carpenter

I feel a little better today.
But how long shall I lie
coiled here?
The marrow of my bones is gouged out and eaten.
I'm a mere ghost. I just breathe.

This is April.
The jackfruit tree that shines
like slashed gold at the touch of a chisel,
and the honey-mango tree that always tempts the hand
to carve a toy boat from its trunk,
will be shaking now
with blossom, with fruit.
If only I could creep up to the window
and take a look at them!
There's not a plaintain stump in my garden,
and my heart beats when I see a tree,
any tree, anywhere.

That single *champak* tree near the Uliyannur temple.
O it's huge, it's so straight.
Nine men can't hug it with joined hands.
No bend, no crack, not a hole in it, not a hole.
I can measure it with my eyes:
it's more than eighty *kols*.
If you cut it down, you can change the bamboo thatch

of every mother's son in the village.
Or else we could make rafters for houses
that would be the envy of chieftains.
But this stump's now rotten.
What's the use of wishing for things?
I can't even sink the edge of my chisel
into wood any more.

Nani, she sits on the doorstep,
her stomach caved in, bent double,
fumbling for bits and pieces of dry betel leaf,
a chunk of betel nut, a stalk of tobacco.
Fire a cannon in her ear, she won't hear it.
She's an old crone now.
I remember the day she stood by my side,
straight as a *champak* tree in bloom,
a body fresh from under the chisel,
her smile a sparkle of new silver.

> The old eyes came out of the gray bush of the eyebrows,
> went out through the back door all eaten up by white ants
> and wandered there for a while.
> "If only I could get up, I could crawl.
> O the hand that could have held up an old man . . . "
> The old carpenter shook with sobs.
> As if to wipe it all away, memory and all,
> his hand passed slowly over the furrows on his forehead.

If only I could somehow totter up to the workshop,
I could at least sit there,
and taste the gladness
that only scale and chisel can bring.

That temple, like a huge inverted bowl
carved in black wood, shining under the sky—
it rose under these working hands.
With my chisel I put in his hands,
my child made that sacred eagle now there
on the flagmast of burnished brass,
and those wings that look as if they're moving.

They say I'm green with envy.
What father won't beam with pride

on hearing the praises of his son?
But then, you can stop the clappers of a thousand bells,
but you can't stop one wagging tongue.
We two made teakwood images
of the guardsmen of the eight directions,
and placed them on the twin towers:
one made with this hand, the other with his.
They said his image had more life than mine.
My son wins, but what does it matter
for a father to lose to his son?
Isn't his glory my glory too?

But look, they said, my face darkened
to hear the boy praised.
I may be a carpenter, but am I not also a father?
They said, the old man knows the carpentry and the craft,
but it's the son who has the sculptor's art.
Why should these village idiots gabble like this?
We sat near each other at work in the shop,
but there was silence between us.
Let them slight me and say what they will.
Can I, can I, his real father,
really wish for this dreadful end?
He may be clever, may even be a genius,
but he got it all from his father.
That old Nayar said, when I went to his house,
"When the moon arrives, the sun must fade."
Why did he have to say such things?

Once, for fun, I made a moving doll
and fixed it below the bridge.
At the first footfall the doll would dance like a water
  goddess;
when a man came to the middle of the bridge,
she would come up on the water inch by inch
and open her mouth and spit
at the unsuspecting man,
taking him completely by surprise.
There were milling crowds at the river to see this wonder.

Young sandalwood trees emit their fragrance
if they are chafed,

but, let me tell you,
my child proved his mettle against mine
without scorn or ill will.
In four days, another doll rose in his name
on the lips of the people everywhere.
When my doll came up to spit,
his doll would slowly turn and lift her hand;
and when mine opened her mouth to spit,
his would slap her smartly in the face.
I felt that slap.
Even in the sky there isn't room enough for two moons.
He left the house. Nani was in tears.
My heart burned inside me like a heap of paddy husk,
but I held my tongue.

Then came the elephant *pandal* for the temple.
Why on earth did I have to call
on this great son of mine for it?
My master said to me,
"Consult your son and make the pandal beautiful."
I felt like turning back at once.
But I didn't.
Consult! No one so far had said that to me.

It might look like envy.
But isn't a son's glory the father's?
Though the carpenter may work with wood,
he himself isn't wood.
The pandal came up well.
As you know, a pandal needs artistic work on the facade.
He said, "I'll look after that, if you wish,
and my father can work on putting up the gables."
Does he, my son, have to tell me,
his father, to put up the gables?
Do I need his nod for this?

His hands were working
on Goddess Lakshmi's lotus,
carving sandalwood.
And I was shaping a wooden rivet
with the broad chisel,
its blade glittering in the sun

like the edge of a sword.
And then, unawares,
unawares it slipped out of my hand,
that chisel!

I began to pray at once
and begged of God that it shouldn't fall on my son.

In the flick of an eyelash
I saw my son reeling to the ground,
head almost severed from body.
People gathered around.
Eyes, like long sharp needles, looked at me.
How could I find my feet on the ladder?
I somehow plunged to the ground.
It seems my son then said, "Forgive me."
I didn't hear the words.
Curly hair gummed to the neck with blood,
in blood he lay.
Those staring eyes
that had swallowed all pain, that sight
is always with me, it doesn't leave me.

And no one has seen Nani smile since then.
Scalding tears flowed from her eyes
till they could flow no more.
Who will believe that it was a slip of the hand?
Whatever one might say, who will ever believe it?

O Nani, you don't believe it, do you,
will a father ever do this?
My son would now have been the staff of my life,
if only it hadn't happened.
"Happened? Made to happen!"
a little voice says inside me,
correcting me again and again.
Can a father do it?
Something hammers away at my heart with a mallet,
something tries to pull out that nail
hammered in so deep.

Nani broke the old man's chain of memories
as she pounded away at her little hand mill
of betel leaf and betel nut,
"It's some time since those cobwebs
were swept from the ceiling.
Did something fall into your eyes?
Why're they watering?"

Translated from Malayalam
by K. M. George and A. K. Ramanujan

Marathi

Indira Sant (1914-)

Household Fires

The daughter's job: without a murmur
to do the chores piling up around the house
until she leaves for work,
to pay her younger brother's fees,
to buy her sister ribbons,
to get her father's spectacles changed.
To take the others to the movies on holidays,
to keep back a little and hand over the rest
on payday.

The son's job: fresh savory snacks
for the whole household to eat:
to bring back the clothes from the washerman,
to clean and put away the bicycle,
to sing out of key while packing his father's lunch
at the stroke of the hour,
to open the door sulkily
whenever someone comes home from the movies,
to wrinkle his brow
when he puts out his hand for money
and is asked instead "How much? For what?"

The younger daughter's job:
to savor the joys of shyness,
to shrink back minute by minute.
The younger son's job:

to choke all the while, grow up slowly
in states of wet and dry.

Four children learning in her fold,
her body drained by hardship,
what's left of her? A mass of tatters,
five tongues of flame
licking and licking at her on every side,
fanning and fanning the fire in her eyes
till her mind boils over,
gets burned.

Translated from Marathi by Vinay Dharwadker

Arun Kolatkar (1932-   )

the alphabet

anvil arrow bow box and brahmin
cart chariot cloud and compost heap
are all sitting in their separate squares

corn cup deer duck and frock
ganesh garlic hexagon and house
all have places of their own

inkpot jackfruit kite lemon and lotus
mango medicine mother old man and ostrich
are all holding their proper positions

pajamas pineapple rabbit and ram
sacrifice seal soldier and spoon
won't interfere with each other

sugarcane sword tap and tombstone
umbrella watermelon weight and yacht
have all found their final release

the mother won't put her baby on the compost heap
the brahmin won't season the duck with garlic
the yacht won't hit the watermelon and sink

unless the ostrich eats the baby's frock
the soldier won't shoot an arrow into ganesh's belly
and if the ram doesn't knock down the old man

why would he need to smash the cup on
  the tombstone

Translated from Marathi by Vinay Dharwadker

Oriya

Bhanuji Rao (1926-)

Fish

Dawn,
like petals of drenched roses.
Six naked bodies
glide forward furtively
in the practiced motions of some dance,
rippling the water's sleek body.

Slowly they close in on one another,
cutting across the cries
  of kingfisher and kite.
They move up, six torsos,
  black and naked,
deepening the repose of snail and ancient toad.

And now the net is wound,
  rising up
under twelve greedy, watchful eyes;
threshing bodies of carp and tiny fry,
  brilliant as the sun.

Translated from Oriya by Jayanta Mahapatra

Punjabi

Amrita Pritam (1919-   )

The Pariah

Years ago
you and I went our separate ways
without regret.
Only one thing I never quite understood
when you and I said goodbye
and our house was sold.

Some empty vessels lay outside
in the courtyard
staring at us.
Others lay overturned,
hiding their faces.
A wilted creeper
climbed down the door,
perhaps complaining to us
or to the water tap
about the lack of water.
All these are now mere memories.

I only remember
that pariah
who entered our empty room
for some unknown reason.
And the door was locked
on the outside.

Three days later
when the deal was clinched
our house was sold.
We exchanged the keys for money.
The new owner
was shown each room.
And in one of the rooms we found
the corpse of that dog.

I have never heard that dog bark.
I only remember the smell of its corpse.
That smell still haunts me:
it returns from everything I touch.

Translated from Punjabi by the poet

Tamil

Subramania Bharati (1882-1921)

Wind, 9

Wind, come softly.
Don't break the shutters of the windows.
Don't scatter the papers.
Don't throw down the books on the shelf.
There, look at what you did—you threw them all down.
You tore the pages of the books.
You brought rain again.
You're very clever at poking fun at weaklings.
Frail crumbling houses, crumbling doors, crumbling rafters,
crumbling wood, crumbling bodies, crumbling lives,
crumbling hearts—
the wind god winnows and crushes them all.
He won't do what you tell him.
So, come, let's build strong homes,
let's joint the doors firmly.
Practice to firm the body.
Make the heart steadfast.
Do this, and the wind will be friends with us.
The wind blows out weak fires.
He makes strong fires roar and flourish.
His friendship is good.
We praise him every day.

Translated from Tamil by A. K. Ramanujan

Urdu

Aziz Qaisi

Outside the Furnace

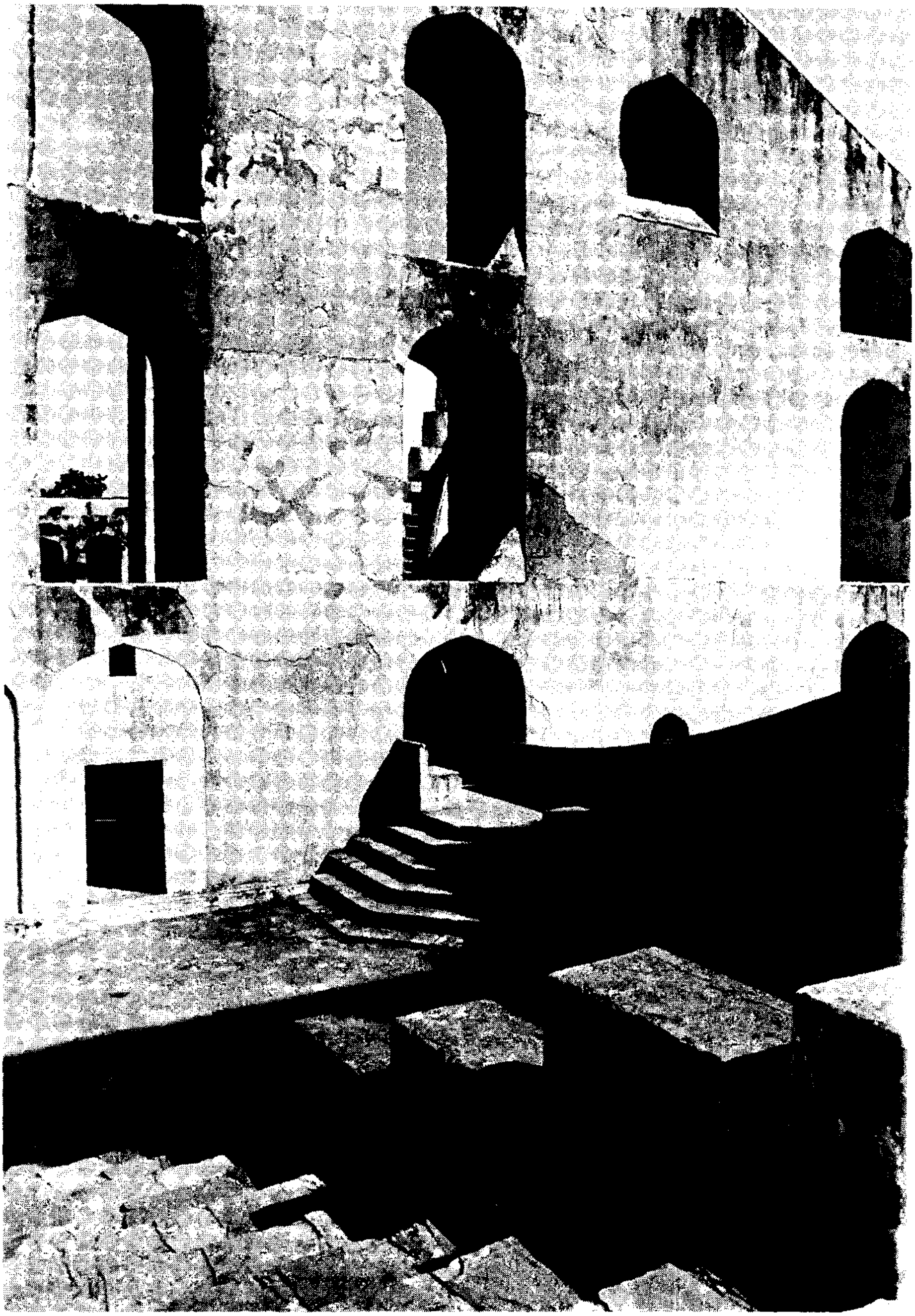
Every day
she threw supple arms,
her soft, silken thighs,
her young and rounded breasts,
her rosy lips and cheeks,
her glossy black hair,
and all her body parts
into the burning furnace.
A thick liquid,
the color of silver and gold,
set in the hot and cold forms of her breaths
and became her body.

One night
when she threw her body
into the burning furnace,
the gold and silver liquid would not set
in the hot and cold forms of her breaths.
All her limbs were scattered.
First her lips,
then her cheeks,
and then her arms were thrown apart.
Her hair was scorched,
her breasts were consumed,
her waist was seared,
her thighs were parched.

Then the heavy liquid,
turning into jagged golden nuggets,
sank into her bones
until she died.

But her eyes still live.
They say to me:
Throw your body's steel,
the glass of your heart
into the furnace.
Look, every day and every night and every moment,
you too are dying, just like me.
Everyone is dying, just like me.
But take this warning
and save your eyes.

Translated from Urdu by Baidar Bakht and Leslie Lavigne



Theatre in India

Girish Karnad

Performed in urban, glitzy movie houses and on rural, well-worn ground, theatre in India is expansive and experimental. Theatre can simultaneously be entertainment, political commentary, and artistic statement, and can be composed in traditional, realistic, and postmodern forms. Indian playwrights and directors have had years of changing influences. Theatre often gropes toward the past, looking for meaning, with the tools of the present: video, lighting, shifting audiences. But to have impact on the heart of society, drama must attempt honesty—not merely by using a mythical Indian history, but by engaging actively with possibilities in the present. Like masks worn by actors that allow them to express otherwise hushed truths, Indian theatre enables immediate, manipulative representations of reality.

I belong to the first generation of playwrights to come of age after India became independent. Perhaps the best way for me to give you an idea of the state of Indian theatre is to present a mosaic of impressions, ideas, feelings, and anecdotes from my experience. As in the case of the protagonist in Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, autobiography can sometimes become a metaphor for history.

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Every theatre is rooted in the culture of its own language, so there are as many theatre situations as there are languages. India has oral traditions, riddles, proverbs, songs, ballads, tales, and epics in more than 3,000 mother-tongues.[1] These forms are potentially or partially theatrical. As one moves from the kitchen in the village (for that is where tales are told) to the electronically equipped movie hall in the big city, one encounters theatre in different guises. To make any sense of the subject at all, I shall stick to a narrow definition of theatre and its purpose, which I hope will become clearer as I go along.

In my childhood, in a small town in Karnataka, I was exposed to two theatre forms that seemed to represent irreconcilably different worlds. Father took the entire family to see plays staged by troupes of professional actors called *natak* companies, which toured the countryside throughout the year. The plays were staged in semipermanent structures on proscenium stages, with wings and drop curtains, and were illuminated by petromax lamps.

Once the harvest was over, I went with the servants to sit up nights watching the more traditional *yakshagana* performances. The stage, a platform with a canopy and a back curtain, was erected in the open air and lit by torches.

By the time I was in my early teens, the natak companies had ceased to function and yakshagana had begun to seem quaint, even silly, to me. Soon we moved to a big city. This city had a college and electricity but no professional theatre.

I saw theatre again only when I went to Bombay for my postgraduate studies. One of the first things I did in Bombay was to go and see a play, which happened to be Strindberg's *Miss Julie* directed by the brilliant young Ebrahim Alkazi.

I have been told since then that it was one of Alkazi's less successful productions. The papers tore it to shreds the next day. But when I walked out of the theatre that evening, I felt as though I had been put through an emotionally or even a physically painful rite of passage. I had read some Western playwrights in college, but nothing had prepared me for the power and violence I experienced that day. By the norms I had been brought up on, the very notion of laying bare the inner recesses of the human psyche like this for public consumption seemed obscene. What impressed me as much as the psychological cannibalism of the play was the way lights faded in and out on stage. Until we moved to the city, we had lived in houses lit by hurricane lamps. Even in the city, electricity was something we switched on and off. The realization that there were instruments called dimmers that could gently fade the lights in or out opened up a whole new world of magical possibilities.

Most of my contemporaries went through some similar experience at some point in their lives. We stepped out of mythological plays lit by torches or petromax lamps straight into Strindberg and dimmers. The new technology could not be divorced from the new psychology. The two together defined a stage that was like nothing we had known or suspected. I have often wondered whether it wasn't that evening that, without being actually aware of it, I decided I wanted to be a playwright.

At the end of my stay in Bombay, I received a scholarship to go abroad for further studies. It is difficult to describe to an American audience, or even to the younger generation of Indians, the kind of tensions that this award created. My family was of course delighted, but it was close-knit and I was the first of its members to go abroad. My family wanted me to return home after my studies, marry within the caste, and settle down to a safe job; I was keen to launch out into the world and go where adventure led me. What made the situation suffocating was that in the manner of the Brahmin middle class, nothing was discussed or even expressed openly.

In the midst of these tensions, a few weeks before leaving for England, I suddenly found myself writing a play. The play surprised me in several ways. First, because it was a play and I had always imagined I was a poet. Second, because it appeared in Kannada, the language of my childhood, rather than in English, in which I had trained myself to write. Lastly, it was a story from the Mahabharata, from which I considered myself alienated. In fact, I hadn't been aware I remembered the myth until I started writing the play. It was the myth of King Yayati.

While still in the prime of his life, King Yayati was cursed to old age for a moral lapse on his part. Distraught at the thought of impending decrepitude, Yayati searched for a young man who would be willing to give him his youth in exchange for the curse and found him in his own son. Thus, the son became old; the father became young, younger than his son. The myth ends on a note of self-realization and tranquility. But, befitting a young Indian who had just discovered Strindberg and Anouilh, my play had a tragic end.

At the time of writing, I had seen the play only as an escape from my tensions. But, looking back, I am surprised how accurately the myth reflected my anxieties, my resentment at the elders who seemed to be demanding that I sacrifice my future for their peace of mind. By the time I had finished writing the play, it was not my parents but this myth that had appeared out of nowhere to come to my aid that seemed to pose the real challenge. It had nailed me to my past.

Alkazi was fond of Anouilh, and my admiration for his production of *Antigone* and *Eurydice* had probably much to do with my turning back to my own mythology. The point is that the mythology was there, ready, waiting for me when I turned. Admiration, however, cannot explain the close modeling of *Yayati* or *Antigone* for form and style. I had no theatrical form to turn to. This is a problem many Indian playwrights face today, particularly those from North India, where there is little exposure to theatre. A playwright needs a tradition he can call his own, even if it is only to reject it. Anouilh could refer to Greek tragedy and its neoclassical reincarnation as well as to the theatre of occupied France. I could only imitate Anouilh, for there was nothing to refer to: the natak companies and yakshagana seemed to belong to another world altogether. Nothing filled the void they had left.

It is extraordinary how little professional theatre is to be seen in most Indian cities, and even in places that show some evidence of theatrical activity, how little is moderately good. In Bombay, one can see scores of Marathi and Gujarati plays advertised in daily papers. Calcutta has a few plays staged in Bengali. No other cities in India have regular professional theatre.

To understand why urban Indian theatre is in this state today, one has to go back to the nineteenth century, when what is called modern Indian theatre first made its appearance, independently in Bombay and Calcutta. It is no coincidence that these cities were both creations of the British maritime trade with no pre-British Indian history. The populations of these cities had benefited from British education and had prospered financially under British rule. It was inevitable, then, that the entertainment they sought for themselves should also be modeled on English theatre. Two features of the new theatre borrowed from the West were to set it totally apart from anything that preceded it and to qualify it for the adjective *modern*.

The first feature was the proscenium stage, which radically altered the traditional player-audience relationship. The audience was separated from the stage, which discouraged active participation and response. The wings and drop curtains led to an emphasis on illusionism and other stage tricks. The second innovation, far more important in its impact, was the sale of tickets, which changed the relationship of the theatregoers to the theatre itself. Until then, acting groups in India had depended on patronage of temples, princes, and high officials (as even the new theatre initially did in Calcutta). Since it had no financial stake in the show, the audience was willing to take a risk where the performance itself was concerned. Its attitude was similar to that still found in the performance of Hindustani music, in which the artist is judged by his ability to improvise within strictly laid-down limits and hence has the right to occasionally not come up to the mark. In folk theatres, actors today still train for particular roles rather than rehearse for particular shows. It is not unusual for an actor to meet the rest of a cast for the first time during a performance. The actors' training helps them to determine the shape of the whole show by improvising responses to one another on stage.

Once it has to pay to see a show, an audience begins to demand its money's worth. Performances become prepackaged goods sold in endless replications. The run of the play in the competitive market decides its worth and freezes it in a shape it cannot change without affecting its saleability. How closely this new kind of theatre was wedded to the ethos of the colonial city can be seen from the fact that when this model of theatre succeeded in Bombay and Calcutta, its first imitations appeared in Madras, another city created by British trade and administration with no pre-British Indian history of its own.

Of the two cities that gave birth to modern Indian theatre, Calcutta had a more homogeneous audience with a language that unified it. Exposure to the West had actually led to a flowering of new literature in Bengali.

The language situation in Bombay was more complex. The new theatre groups had been started by Parsi entrepreneurs who spoke Gujarati at home. After starting with productions in English, they switched to Gujarati, then to Urdu, and finally, in search of wider audiences around the turn of the century, to Hindi. The expanding audience was mainly Hindu, while many of the writers for the Parsi companies were Muslim, since Urdu literature had flowered in Muslim courts. The Parsi entrepreneur had to ensure that the fare pleased all tastes and communities and developed a style that was essentially neutral with regard to communal differences and preferences. The plays dealt with subjects ranging from Middle Eastern romances to Hindu myths and adaptations of Shakespeare, but the treatment avoided all religious and ethical nuances. Secularism was a fashionable concept, and, in the hands of the Parsi entrepreneurs, became another name for its escapist fare. The word *entertainment* came to mean submergence in spectacle or stage tricks—and continues to mean that today for the film-going and television-watching middle class.

There was another reason why the drama produced by this theatre remained entirely trivial. Ashis Nandy has drawn our attention to, and brilliantly analyzed, the double set of values by which the urban bourgeoisie seemed to live—professing faith in Western values of equality, individualism, secularism, or free competition in public while sticking to caste and family loyalties at home.[2] Whatever the sociological justification for this division, its effects on drama were disastrous. To have any value at all, drama must at some level engage honestly with the contradictions that lie at the heart of the society it talks to and about. The Parsi theatre society refused to acknowledge the existence of any problem. As a result, although it ruled supreme for almost seventy-five years, the theatre—and its many reincarnations in the regional languages—produced no drama of any consequence.

Its greatest contribution, in fact, was in the field of music, for although its Victorian model had no songs or dances, this theatre was Indian enough to realize that here entertainment by definition demands music. In India, the mere gathering of people leads to music, at family get-togethers, tea parties, political meetings, and friends' circles. The Parsi drew music from any available source—folk songs, religious songs of Hindus and Muslims, and classical music—and created a unique style immediately recognizable as theatre music. Some of the great stars of this theatre were great singers. A play became so identified with songs that it was not unusual for most of the audience to walk out of the hall en masse as soon as a song was over, to return later only when the next song began. If film music today is a separate institution by itself, healthier than the film industry, which provides film music with the vehicles in which to situate songs—often quite arbitrarily—the credit must go to the use of songs in the Parsi theatre.

Naturally, once Indian movies started to include talking—or singing—the Parsi theatre edifice collapsed without a fight. In the West, theatre survived the onslaught of movies, for it had produced a body of plays whose pleasure could be fully savored only when staged. No film, no television version can fully communicate what Shakespeare, Ibsen, or Chekhov can give on stage. The Parsi theatre family had only a repertoire of songs, dances, spectacles, and romantic escapades to justify its existence—and all these could be supplied more cheaply on a much vaster scale by the film industry.

It is interesting that the new film industry developed in the very cities that had given birth to the urban Indian theatre—Bombay, Calcutta, and Madras. Commercial films also borrowed the basic principles of entertainment from the theatre and explored the film form only to the extent to which these principles could be accommodated within it. Not surprisingly, the contribution of half a century of commercial filmmaking lies in the extraordinary range and richness of its music.

This relationship between the film industry and the urban theatre has continued since then, mainly because films, like theatre, have remained an essentially urban medium. There are less than 15,000 cinema halls in India, including traveling tent theatres. When one allows for the fact that a city like Bangalore has nearly 100 cinema halls, the urban bias in the distribution of these halls becomes apparent. The distribution exactly duplicates the density distribution of natak companies. More than half the cinema halls in the country are situated in the four southern states, all of which have a history of flourishing natak companies. Maharashtra, Bengal, and Gujarat repeat the same pattern.

Again, since the 1930s, which saw the collapse of the Parsi theatre system, revival in theatre activity has been witnessed only in those cities where the local language film industry has collapsed. In Bombay, the aggressive Hindi film industry pushed the Marathi film industry into the background in its own state, which in turn led to a revival of Marathi theatre to fill the vacuum. The loss of the East Bengal market after partition, and postwar competition from Hindi films, debilitated the movie industry in Calcutta and thus led to a revival of Bengali theatre in the 1950s. In the 1970s a long-ignored folk theatre form called *jatra* was reorganized by entrepreneurs to meet the need for entertainment in rural Bengal. The success of the jatras has been so phenomenal that many have now invaded Calcutta, taking away urban actors and actresses from theatre by offering fabulous fees. Theatre in Calcutta is in trouble again.

The fact that theatre does not exist in isolation but is a link in a long chain of reflexive relationships connecting different entertainment media, and that each one of these forms defines itself in terms of or in relation to the form immediately next to it spatially or temporally, may seem too obvious to require further insistence. It needs to be stressed only because any efforts to preserve, encourage, and develop traditional art forms in danger of extinction need to bear this principle of the substitution of forms in mind and also because this important relationship is entirely missing from most discussions of the history of Indian art forms.

Standard, official art history is based on the assumption that there is such a thing as a homogeneous "Indian culture," within which Indian theatre, Indian dance, Indian music, and so on find their own homogeneous identities without conflict. According to this theory, when applied to the field of performing arts, all traditional forms are merely expressions of a basic philosophy, an attitude toward life and the arts, which is common to all Indians and which has remained unchanged through the centuries, so that no history needs to be taken into account. It is further asserted that the *Natya Sastra*, an ancient (though probably not the most ancient) treatise on drama attributed to a mythical poet called Bharata Muni, gives the earliest statement of this philosophy. Actually, what this philosophy is, is never spelled out. But that precisely is the point: the *Natya Sastra* plays the same role in this school of aesthetics that the Vedas play in the orthodox schools of Indian philosophy. It is the principle of their acceptance, rather than their actual content, which is of the essence.

The enormous diversity of performing arts in India is too obvious to be denied. What is explicitly denied is that conflicting philosophies, historical situations, and cultural attitudes may have shaped these different forms and may motivate them still today. "Diversity," it is insisted, only points to "an underlying unity." Most of these theorists are Brahmins who, while theorizing, identify Brahminism with Hinduism and then proceed to assume that every Indian is Hindu in thought and spirit. In view of the Sanskrit bias of Brahminism, it is not surprising that even folk and tribal material—if studied at all—is studied in the light of Sanskrit texts. For instance, while discussing the first few chapters of the *Natya Sastra*, Dr. Kapila Vatsayan says:

> Many regional dance drama forms which are still performed today in India, particularly the three different forms of Chhau [masked drama], rigorously observe these preliminary rites before a performance . . . the worship . . . performed on both the Sanskrit stage and in its living continuations—regional theater forms like Kutiyattam and Mayurbhauja [a form of Chhau].[3]

The phrases *still performed today* and *living continuations* are surely disingenuous. They conceal the fact that Chhau as a theatrical form is only 100 years old, that it was initially a hunting ritual dance that was blended with the defunct martial arts to create a balletlike form. Later, local princes employed Brahmin gurus to polish this tribal form into a vehicle for nontribal, Hindu myths. The principles of the *Natya Sastra* were thus a later injection into a non-Hindu art form to gain respectability for it.

Though there is little justification—apart of course from political necessity—for such deliberate obfuscation in the late 1980s, it hardly needs to be pointed out that the myth of an all-Indian cultural unity had a valid role to play in the colonial as well as the immediate post-Independence period.

In 1961, a seminar was organized in New Delhi by the Sangeet Natak Akademi (academy in charge of the performing arts) on the future of Indian theatre. From the very start, participants fell into opposing camps: those who thought traditional Indian theatre had relevance to contemporary theatre work and those who considered this attitude regressive and antimodern. Neither side examined what forms they were actually talking about and whether different traditional forms might have different kinds of relevance. Both sides in effect agreed on the concept of *a* traditional Indian theatre.

For a practitioner, however, such generalizations were hardly helpful. If the concept of tradition is to be of any use at all, one must try to understand it in all its complexity, even illogicality, and with as little mystification as possible.

Before I go on to talk of my experiments with traditional theatre forms, I must deal with another major Western influence: realism. A study of the reasons that realism has failed to produce any worthwhile drama in India may help explain the sense of urgency with which one approached native forms.

Realism made its appearance in the thirties, in reaction to the vacuity of the natak companies as well as in response to the challenge thrown by the leaders of the national Independence movement that we had to prove ourselves worthy of independence by cleansing our society of its many ills. This was essentially the playwright's theatre. The productions were often directed by the playwrights themselves. Unlike the Parsi theatre, where every move was controlled by budgetary considerations, the realistic theatre was motivated by genuine idealism. The writer, the actors, and the audience were all united by a common concern for social reform and national independence and in their optimism believed changing history possible. Often the groups consisted entirely of university teachers, their students, and white-collar workers, who saw this kind of theatre as a mission rather than as a profession. They remained amateurs. But their involvement and brilliance gave many of these plays an immediacy, a sharp edge, unseen before in the company natak plays. It must be stated right here that if in the West the need of a person to be seen as an individual, as a being unique in himself, has remained the central concern of the realistic theatre, in India realism never went beyond social problems. As has often been pointed out, in India individualism has never been accepted as a value in itself and every Indian defines himself in relational terms, in terms of his relationship to the other members of his family, clan, and caste. Issues too are perceived in the same relational terms. I have often noticed that even Western plays concerned with the problem of the individual tend to be perceived by Indian audiences as dealing with social relations. When Arthur Miller's *A View from the Bridge* was staged in Madras a few years ago, the audience could not accept or understand the need for the incest motif in the story. If Eddie Carbone insisted on breaking up the love affair of his orphan niece (who is also his ward) with an illegal immigrant, the audience found nothing objectionable in his behavior. It was an uncle's duty to make sure that his niece was not duped by unscrupulous young men in search of the American nationality. At another seminar, only lip service was paid to the standard American interpretation of Miller's *Death of a Salesman* as a play about a man's pursuit of the American dream. The participants obviously saw the breakup of a close-knit family as the real theme of the play.

Indian realistic drama was an improvement over its predecessor, the company natak play, in that it took itself seriously as art and also as an instrument of social change. Yet its inability to shake off the overpowering influence of the European model was to stunt its development: Bernard Shaw was the new inspiration, along with Ibsen (as interpreted by Shaw). The proscenium stage continued, only the grand sets were replaced by the three-walled living room. And this literal borrowing of the Western parlor for description of the Indian home pinpoints the basic weakness in the analytical method of the playwrights.

In the West, the living room has come to represent the last refuge of the individual, the safe and sure center from which he can confront the sociopolitical processes of the outside world. The living room in an Indian home serves exactly the opposite purpose: it is the deliberately neutral space in which, in a show of formal cordiality, the family keeps at bay people from the outside world. Nothing is meant to happen in an Indian living room. Most people, given tea in the living room, know that they are not to venture further into the house. For it is in the kitchen and the god's room—beyond the living room—that issues close to the heart of the family are debated, resolved, or left to fester. Nor could anything be less Indian than the behavior of the Shavian characters, lucid in expounding their points of view, uninhibited by who they are, whom they are addressing, who is listening and where. Hierarchies decide the nature and direction of communication in India. In many land-owning families, fathers and sons do not address each other directly but only through the women of the house or the servants. In Brahmin families, women express opinions on family matters only when the men have sat down for their meals. And so on. It is not uncommon to see in Indian realistic plays, women of the house sitting alongside the menfolk, openly discussing the most private family matters in front of total strangers, a situation unthinkable in traditional Indian homes.

One inevitably comes to the conclusion that these playwrights were so conditioned by the tools of analysis they borrowed from their Western models that they were incapable of seeing even the true geography of their own houses. Of course, it is also possible to argue that these playwrights, many of whom came from the upper castes, were never really serious about getting to the heart of the problem they had started out to analyze.

The three-walled living room continues to provide the setting for most social plays in Bombay and Calcutta today, announcing at the very first sight their total lack of connection with the actuality of social life outside. Only occasionally has a play like Vijay Tendulkar's *Sakharam Buider* made meaningful use of the layout of an Indian home to give precise expression to his theme.

My three years in England had convinced me Western theatre had nothing to offer us. The newly fashionable experiments—like absurdist theatre—had already started to repeat themselves. I had to find my own way, and in desperation I turned to what was most easily available: the natak companies of my childhood.

For my second play, *Tughlaq*, I took my subject matter from medieval history and tried to fit it into the ready-made structure perfected by the orginal Parsi theatre and perpetuated without the slightest modification by the natak companies. A company play consisted of a mechanical alternation of "shallow" and "deep" scenes. The shallow scenes were played in the foreground of the proscenium stage, against a drop curtain, which usually showed a street scene. These scenes were devoted to low comedy, whose ancestry could be traced back both to Shakespeare and to the folk theatre, and kept the audience occupied while the set was being changed in the deep scene behind the curtain. In the deep scene the entire stage space was used to present elaborate palaces and gardens in which heroic characters emoted in lofty rhetoric.

The first half of *Tughlaq* follows this model quite comfortably, but the second half began to rebel against the straight jacket I was putting it in. The most striking aspect of the political scene in the 1960s was the way the newly enfranchised electorate was slowly becoming aware of the power placed in its hands for the first time in history. The other equally visible movement was the gradual displacement of pre-Independence idealism by hard-nosed political cynicism. My shallow scenes refused to remain subsidiary to the deep scenes and in the last scene, the lowly comic entered the deep scene on a par with the king. The form I had borrowed from the company natak was, I felt, too fragile for anything more serious than its repertoire of melodramas. With my very first experience in that style, its possibilities seemed exhausted.

But I had used no songs. My exposure to the Western theatre had made me shy of music in a serious play. And I had to ask myself whether one could in fairness claim, while forswearing its main feature, that one had explored the possibilities of a tradition. *Tughlaq* convinced me of the centrality music had in Indian communication. Not just music but other theatrical conventions too which we have not looked at: dance, verse, monologues, puppets.

Where was one to begin? The logical starting point should have been the classical Sanskrit theatre. Apart from being the earliest known form of theatre in India, it is the only one in our history which qualifies for the description *Indian theatre.* Sanskrit—"the perfected"—was the pan-Indian language which was no one's mother tongue but everyone's medium for intellectual communication, a language of courtly, philosophical, legal, technical, and literary discourse. By 600 A.D., it was widely accepted as a court language, even in South India. Female and lower-class characters in Sanskrit plays did not use Sanskrit, but spoke in Prakrit—"the natural." Prakrits must have been close to mother tongues at some point in history, for by the time Sanskrit drama had come into its own, they too had become formal and inflexible. Given the neutrality of these languages with reference to geographical and cultural variations, playwrights from all over India contributed to Sanskrit drama, and some plays like *Ratnavali* seem to have been staged and proved popular in different parts of India. In this sense the theatre was Indian.

It was also genuine theatre. Its precise objective was to entertain. The *Natya Sastra* states that Brahma created theatre as the fifth Veda in response to a demand for a pastime (*kridaniyakam*) accessible to all layers of the society. Bharata Muni, to whom the *Natya Sastra* is attributed, lists the following among the goals of drama:

> occasionally piety, occasionally sport, occasionally wealth, occasionally peace of mind, occasionally laughter, occasionally fighting, occasionally sexual passion, occasionally slaughter . . . . [Theatre] will produce wholesome instruction, create courage, pastime (entertainment) and pleasure.[4]

Given the importance of Sanskrit theatre in the history of Indian stage, one could have expected the drama to inspire at least some of the playwrights investigating the "Indian" identity of their theatre. But no playwright of this century—not even Tagore, who tried hard—has shown any genuine influence of Sanskrit drama. Modern writers find it hard to respond to the well-ordered universe taken for granted in these plays, in which everyone from the gods to the lowest mortals finds an allotted slot and in which few of the basic values are open to question. Besides, a lot of misunderstanding has been caused by sheer ignorance. Because unhappy endings are forbidden, it is assumed the plays have no sense of the tragic. Because patronage came from the courts, which probably deliberately limited the audience to a few courtiers, it is assumed that these plays were elitist—an impression strengthened by bad translations and careless reading.

There is, however, a more practical reason that Sanskrit drama has rarely struck a responsive chord in the most sympathetic of viewers: most productions of Sanskrit plays are so consistently bad that it is easy after a while to attribute the failure to the texts themselves rather than to the well-meaning and hardworking group of actors.

To do justice to a Sanskrit play, a producer needs a fully worked-out style that is complex and subtle and a cast of actors who have been thoroughly trained in that style. One cannot cast any set of actors nurtured in company natak notions or in the realist school and make the plays work.

Only in the last decade have two theatre directors—Kavalan Narayana Panikkar in Kerala and Ratan Thiyam in Manipur (notice the geographical spread)—staged Sanskrit plays with actors specifically trained for that purpose. The results have been spectacular. They have shown that, when properly staged, there is nothing otherworldly or quaint about Sanskrit drama.

Sanskrit drama flourished between 200 B.C. and about 700 A.D. No other theatre in the world has had as long and continuous a history. Parallel with it there must have been performances in the languages of the common people, though we have no evidence of the exact nature of these performances. It has been conjectured that some of the ten dramatic forms listed in the *Natya Sastra* probably refer to the more popular varieties. By 1000 A.D., Sanskrit theatres had long been dead, and regional languages—mother tongues, unlike Sanskrit—had begun to emerge as vehicles of artistic and philosophical expression.

It is interesting that while the new regional language literatures on the whole followed Sanskrit models, they did not produce written drama. Theatre as it developed in the postclassical period depended on improvised dialogue, with only the musical parts of the performance handed down. Its aesthetic too differed, since many of these forms probably originated in folk ritual. Chandrashekhar Kambar has described how many elements of the possession ritual in honor of Goddess Mariamma are in fact theatrical, involving as they do, putting on makeup, dressing up, miming the myth of the goddess, and being possessed.[5] The resemblance between theatre forms like kathakali and yakshagana and the spirit cults in the neighboring areas is too close to be missed. The fact that many of these forms indulge unashamedly in scenes of terror, violence, and death—forbidden in Sanskrit theatre—is surely attributable to their origins in folk ritual.[6]

Another major influence on the postclassical period was *bhakti*, which literally means devotion or faith. Starting in a corner of South India, the bhakti movement swept right across India, spreading the message of total surrender to the Lord's love, of complete immersion in religious rapture. Bhakti turned theatre into a handmaiden of religion, against the secular assumptions of Sanskrit and folk theatre. While bhakti created new ritual forms like *raslila* and *ramlila* (theatrical games by which devotees participate in the ecstatic play of Rama and Krishna) to spread their word, its missionary zeal is probably responsible for the contempt with which many secular theatre forms are treated in India today.

During the 1960s the central question facing every serious playwright was how to draw on these various strands in the traditional theatre—some of which had lost contact with urban civilization during the course of the last 200 years and many of which seemed deeply rooted in religious sensibility—so as to revitalize our own work. Immediately after Independence, the government of India founded three autonomous academies—Sahitya for literature, Sangeet Natak for the performing arts, and Lalit Kala for the fine arts—whose main function was the discovery, retrieval, and rejuvenation of arts on the brink of extinction. Parallel with these three central academies were bodies the state governments set up. Though most of the reasons for the criticism leveled against these bodies—red tape, ignorance, insensitivity, waste—were justifiable, these state organizations did valuable work in bringing the richness of our own forgotten past to our attention again. The question was, Could this paraphernalia of masks, half curtains, mime, dance, and music become meaningful outside its own context?

It was when I was focusing on the question of the use of masks and their relationship to theatre music that my play *Hayavadana* suddenly began to take shape in my head. The play is based on Thomas Mann's *The Transposed Heads*, which in turn is based on one of the riddles in the anthology *Vetalapancavimsatikatha*.

A young bride finds herself in the unenviable position of discovering that both her husband and his best friend have committed suicide by beheading themselves for her sake. When the bride, despairing of her own future, also tries to commit suicide, Goddess Kali appears in front of her and tells her that if she will only rejoin the heads to the bodies, the men will come back to life again. The woman does as told. The men come back to life, only to find she has mixed up the heads. The story ends with a question: Who is the real husband, the one with the husband's head or the one with his body?

The *Vetalapancavimsatikatha* answers: since the essence of a man is represented by his head, the husband's head will identify the husband even in the new situation.

Mann carries this logic to its ultimate conclusion. Since the head is the man, the body should alter to fit the head. At the end of Mann's story, the bodies have transformed themselves to fit the heads so perfectly that the men are physically exactly as they were at the start of the story. The problem is unresolved.

The basic equation in the tale of the head with the man's person seemed to me to provide perfect justification for the use of masks. For if in modern Western theatre the mask is used in contrast to the face, the persona as against the real person, as Peter Brook points out in *The Empty Space*, in Indian traditional theatre, as in the Greek, the mask is only the face writ large.[7] The mask is a method of projecting the personality of the character to a vast audience. (It is interesting that Sanskrit theatre, playing to a small audience of 200 to 400, did not use masks for normal, human characters.) The mask is the face, is the man, in fact is more, for in folk rituals, the mask represents the spirit by whom the dancer seeks to be possessed. Putting on the mask—or masklike makeup—is the first step to being possessed.

This brought me face to face with the fact that in many traditional forms—certainly in the yakshagana I had seen in my childhood—performances begin with the worship of Lord Ganesh, a god with an elephant's head who very often is represented on stage only by the mask of the elephant head.

Ganesh's head says nothing about his personality. In fact, according to the myth, Ganesh was beheaded by his father, and when the original head could not be found, the head of an elephant that was conveniently at hand was substituted. Whatever the sexual symbolism of the head, the choice of the animal itself was accidental to the god's personality.

As I was struggling with these implications of the mask, I sensed a third being in the space between the divine (Ganesh) and the human (the main story). The play is named after this character. *Hayavadana* means the one with the horse's head: the story of a man who wants to shed his horse's head and become human provides the outer panel within which the main story is framed. Hayavadana's attempts to become a complete man end ironically. The head is the man. He becomes a complete horse. The central logic of the tale "The Head Is the Man" remains intact, while its basic premise (that the head represents the thinking part of man and is therefore the supreme limb) is subverted.

The energy of folk theatre comes from the fact that while it seems to support traditional values, it is also capable of subverting them, looking at them from various points of view. The conventions of the chorus, the mask, and the comic episode permit the simultaneous presentation of widely divergent points of view, some of them even irreconcilable with each other. The form can give rise to a genuine dialectic. In yakshagana, the dialogue is improvised and the characters are permitted to justify their actions directly to the audience. Often, a capable actor playing the evil protagonist Duryodhana will convince the audience that his character has acted nobly throughout the Mahabharata while someone like the god Krishna has been the villain of the piece. The audience applauds to show its appreciation of the actor's arguments. The performance then continues according to the accepted story line, in which Krishna is divine and Duryodhana is wicked. Such debates give each performance a new perspective, make each show a fresh exploration.

If I had to grope my way to the final form of *Hayavadana*, Chandrashekhar Kambar, who also writes in Kannada, arrived at it much more naturally in his play *Jokumaraswamy*. Born and brought up in a village, he was a member of a *bayalata* (an open-air theatre) troupe and thus had a professional's detailed acquaintance with the bayalata form.

Jokumaraswamy deals with a rite in honor of Jokumara, a phallic deity who in the form of a snake gourd is worshipped, and ritually eaten by those who desire children. The plot situations are all stock: the impotent chieftain's virgin wife feeds the snake gourd by mistake to the village rake and has a child by him. The chieftain takes revenge by killing the rake but cannot disclaim the baby, which seems like public proof of his virility.

The explicit message of the play is the same as in Brecht's prologue to *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* and, as a political statement, carries as little conviction: land should belong to the peasant who plows it rather than to the landlord who owns it only legally. The strength of the play and its political implications lie in Kambar's analysis of political power as a mode of compensating for sexual inadequacy and of philandering as a psychosexual equivalent of anarchism. A fertility ritual provides the framework for the action; it also provides a basis from which to question notions of virility and power.

The last fifteen years have seen many other plays that have come from the inspiration and form of traditional Indian theatre. Jabhar Patel's production of Vijay Tendulkar's *Ghashiram Kotwal*, certainly a milestone in the history of modern Indian theatre, used a human curtain of ten singers, which alternately concealed and opened up to reveal the corrupt politics of decadent eighteenth-century Pune. The play is about political leaders who create demons to destroy their political enemies, but the demons get out of hand and turn on their own creators. It is a recurrent theme in Indian mythology. Its contemporary relevance was conclusively proved—ten years after the first showing of the play—by Indira Gandhi and Sant Bhindranwale in the Punjab.

It has not been easy for me to talk about Indian theatre. The major concern of the Indian theatre in the post-Independence period has been to try to define its "Indianness" and to relate itself to the past from which it was cut off. The awful part is that most of these explorations have been done by enthusiastic amateurs, who find it extremely difficult to continue to work in theatre. Most of them have to go into film or television, thus perpetuating the amateur status of the theatre they have helped to keep alive. I see myself as a playwright, but I make a living in film and television. There is a very high elasticity of substitution between the different performing media in India: the participant too gets tossed about violently. We can talk of the excellent work of playwrights like Tendulkar, Kambar, and Elkunchavar, of actors like Vijaya Mehta, Shambhumitra, and Naseeruddin Shah, of directors like Thiyam, Panikkar, B. V. Karantha, and Satyadev Dubey and yet have no continuing professional theatre to point to.

Where does one go from here? Since I began on an autobiographical note, let me say I shall go on writing plays, theatre or no theatre, as at least some of my contemporaries will, I know, too. One writes because one has to: the pleasure one has derived from the theatre drives one on. One writes in the hope that one day there will be more of a professional theatre on which to stage one's work. Meanwhile, one makes a living.

Beyond that, the question of what lies in store for the Indian theatre should be rephrased to include the four media—theatre, cinema, television, and video—for their futures are inextricably intertwined. (I should ideally also include radio, which can reach nearly 95 percent of the population of the country. But I know of no detailed study of its impact.) I have already commented on the reflexive relationship between urban theatre and film. Television was introduced in the mid-1960s in major Indian cities but came into its own only in 1983, when the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting opened its doors to private advertising and started telecasting soap operas produced and sponsored by private, nongovernmental companies.

The very first Hindi soap opera became a national hit. Television, until then watched only for the commercial films telecast weekly as well as for other programs like *Chitrahaar*, a collage of film songs, suddenly developed a viewership of its own. In 1985 alone, the total number of television sets in India leapt from 5,200,000 to 7,200,000. Each set, it is estimated, had an average audience of ten people. Cinema attendance slumped and critics started pointing out that the American and European television experience should have prepared our film industry for mass desertion by its audience in favor of the new toy.

But then something unexpected happened. Within six months, cinema attendance started booming again. The last three years have shown that the big budget films at least do not seem to have been affected by television, except of course on Sundays, when a Hindi feature film is televised.

The most plausible explanation for this about-face of the new audience is that television let it down. The main viewership for commercial films in cities is the industrial working class and other low-income groups as well as women from all strata of society. Television controlled by educated middle-class bureaucrats, programmed by educated middle-class bureaucrats, sensitive to comments by educated middle-class critics, and geared to urban white-collar tastes has nothing to offer these classes, whose expectations of entertainment are still "traditional": they believe a performance should last at least two to two and a half hours and that it should tell an emotionally charged story using songs, dances, or music. The Chekhovian fare handed out by television in twenty-three-minute slots just does not meet the needs of this audience. There is the additional attraction that cinema offers a chance for some kind of privacy, an escape from the overcrowded slums in which most of this audience lives.

Television thus has not materially affected commercial cinema. What it has destroyed—at least temporarily—is "parallel cinema," a movement inspired by the success of Satyajit Ray's films, essentially neoclassical in style, committed to an analysis of contemporary social and political problems. The films of parallel cinema—which, interestingly, usually do not use songs and dances—have been supported by the educated urban middle class. This class has now switched its patronage to television and video. Angry radical filmmakers of the parallel cinema now depend on the patronage of television to make a living.

Soon more than 80 percent of the population of the country will come within the beaming range of television. The cultural and social impact of the very introduction of television into the countryside could be enormous. There is the inevitable impact of the medium itself. The flow of information in rural families is meant to be hierarchically controlled: men and elders process the information that comes into the house. They decide whether it is good for women and children. (I say *meant* because certain kinds of information must flow from woman to woman, bypassing men.) With television, the whole family, indeed the whole village, receives information together, flattening out age and sex hierarchies. In fact, children grasp television messages much faster than adults, whose visual grammar is more elementary. This situation could entirely alter the nature of relationships within the family.

Limiting one's attention to the impact of the new medium on other performing arts, one may conjecture that traditional performing arts, lacking the stamina and capital of commercial cinema, will vanish entirely from the scene; expectations regarding entertainment could alter totally, but only if television becomes a genuine medium of entertainment for the rural population. If the present urban middle-class notions of entertainment continue to shape its policies, television is likely to remain ineffective, even if cheap sets put it within the reach of every family.

Video is the real joker in the pack. Today it is almost impossible to forecast in which direction it is likely to grow and what place it will have in the daily life of the people. Already it is the video, and not television, that has affected the fortunes of the film industry. Fifteen years ago, commercial Indian films had markets spreading from Southeast Asia through the Middle East to Greece and Turkey, as well as in the immigrant congeries in England, in East, West, and South Africa, in Canada and the United States. Within five years of the arrival of video, most of these markets disappeared. Almost all movie houses specializing in the exhibition of Hindi films in these areas closed down. Whereas in 1975 a major film producer in Bombay could cover a substantial portion of his budget from advances made by distributors abroad, now he hopes to sell his video rights for what price he can get before pirated copies appear in the market. Many producers have been known to pirate their own films in an effort to flood the black market before others do so.

Video parlors dot the landscape. Video films play in long-distance buses, in wayside tea shops, in hair-cutting salons. In Bombay I have seen special sheds in which fisherwomen slice and clean their fish or get ready for the market while they watch illegally exhibited video films. Video will soon invade the remotest corner, as films and theatre have not, and without the supercilious attitudes of television. Since most of the operations are illegal, the fare shown is likely to consist of brutal violence and the hard-core pornography of pirated Indian films. Most questions about the future of theatre pale before the spectre of uncontrollable expansion of the video network across the country. Yet I cannot help worrying about theatre.

The media occupy a shifting landscape in which the next electronic gadget could turn a mass medium into a traditional art form. Perhaps quite unrealistically, I dream of the day when a similar ripple will reestablish theatre—flesh-and-blood actors enacting a well-written text to a gathering of people who have come to witness the performance—where it belongs, at the center of the daily life of the people.

ENDNOTES

I am grateful to Dr. A. K. Ramanujan for many of the concepts used in this paper.

[1] A. K. Ramanujan, "Telling Tales," *Dædalus* 118 (4) (Fall 1989): 239–61.

[2] Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983).

[3] Kapila Vatsayan, "Dance and Movement Techniques of Sanskrit Theater," in Rachel Van M. Baumer and James R. Brandon, eds., *Sanskrit Drama in Performance* (Honolulu: University Print of Hawaii, 1981).

[4] G. K. Bhat, *Bharata-Natya-Manjari* (Poona: Bhandarkar Oriental Institute, 1975).

[5] Chandrashekhar Kambar, "Ritual in Kannada Folk Theatre," *Sangeet Natak* 25 (1972): 5–22.

[6] A. K. Ramanujan, "Two Realms of Kannada Folklore," in Stuart H. Blackburn and A. K. Ramanujan, eds., *Another Harmony: New Essays on the Folklore of India* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

[7] Peter Brook, *The Empty Space* (New York: Penguin, 1968).

Of India, Indians, and Science

Pushpa M. Bhargava and Chandana Chakrabarti

As effortlessly as Hinduism assimilates diverse religions, the Indian approach to science embraces the staggeringly inconsistent: from the mental arithmetic of a vegetable vendor to the scientific research institute, from the intricate architecture of Harappa to the high-rise. Ancient and modern mingle in an ambivalent relationship that alternately deflects and directs scientific questing. Lack of systematic research sometimes impedes the day-to-day accrual of knowledge; yet, the kind of searching that culminated in the Vedas and the Upanishads may bring about a discovery like the Nobel-Prize-winning Raman Effect in this century.

To understand the ramifications of Indian science, one would need to look at it against the background of what characterizes India today and against the Indian psyche. The only statement that is, perhaps, true about India is that no statement about India is either true or false. A country of immense contrast and variety, India defies classification. It is a country where the idea of *average* is a myth, and where there is no uniformity, no standard. It has no single norm for anything. Not even the size of paper used in various offices is

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uniform. Where else does one find an equal number of people driving on the right, on the left, and in the middle of the road?

WHAT SETS INDIA APART

We have laws against child marriage and dowry, and we have a substantial number of highly successful women at the top in virtually every profession—be it politics, law, business, civil service, medicine, or science. And yet female infanticide is still practiced in some Indian communities, and some have no qualms about burning a bride for not bringing enough dowry.

Ritualistically, we are wedded to cleanliness, yet we ignore the basic laws of hygiene and do not hesitate to bathe in or drink from the dirtiest of waters. In which metropolis of the world besides Calcutta would one find the underground train system as clean as the rest of the city is dirty?

The country has some of the richest people in the world alongside a large number of the poorest. It is primarily an agricultural country, with over 70 percent of its population engaged in agricultural or related occupations; yet it is also among the top ten industrialized countries of the world. More than half of our countrymen are still illiterate, but an Indian won a Nobel Prize in literature as far back as 1913 and there are many other eminent writers in Indian languages that are known throughout India and abroad.

To a casual visitor, India's variety in life-styles, dress, food, and habits seems staggering. All of this variety has a bearing on the evolution of the Indian perception of science and has partly determined the way science and technology have developed in the country.

The variety we have just mentioned makes Indians tolerant and accommodative to a fault on the one hand and highly parochial on the other. The consequence is that we forgo our rights when we should claim them and demand privileges based on considerations other than merit, such as circumstances of birth.

We are often self-effacing. The Indian miniature paintings and frescoes are examples. They do not bear the name of the artist or artists (many of them were not a single person's effort), for whom the sheer joy of painting was enough; it did not occur to them to be known through their work. And we do not know who did the renowned sculptures of Ajanta and Ellora, Belur and Halebid, Khajuraho and Konark. This anonymity is prevalent even today in other forms of art; for example, few Madhubani paintings or Kalamkari textile pieces, no matter how exquisite, are signed.

Hinduism is the country's dominant religion. But India, after Indonesia, also has the largest Muslim population in the world. It has more Christians than Australia. Buddhism was born in India. The country's constitution recognizes some 10 major scripts, over 500 dialects, and 15 languages. English is not among those languages, but could be. There is political variety in India: many of its constituent states are ruled by parties other than the one ruling at the center.

Indian culture has derived much from Hindu culture, which predates Christianity by many centuries. Hinduism has shown an immense capacity to assimilate; that is why, perhaps, Buddhism could not survive in India; nor could other religions like Islam and Christianity shake Hinduism, even though the country had Muslim and Christian rulers for centuries. The religious tradition in India has attempted to assimilate science as well. Consequently, acceptance of science as something that in the ultimate analysis stands out in contradiction to religious dogma, superstition, and traditional beliefs has been difficult to come by in India. This situation has certainly acted as an impediment to India's development of science.

We have a tremendous respect for tradition, age, and power, which, more often than not, dampens the desire to question authority and thus acts as an impediment to the development of what Jawaharlal Nehru called the "scientific temper." The Indian family structure and the way children are brought up make irrationality the anchor of thought and argue against the spirit of science and its pursuit.

We are by and large fatalistic. There exists a strong spirit of resignation and acceptance of things as they are. This is also our attitude towards calamities; hence, more often than not we take no steps to avert them or to cope with them with modern science and technology.

An offshoot of this tendency is that we are not real planners, though we do make plans (the Eighth Five-Year Plan begins on 1 April 1990). We prefer to deal with problems as they come. No one can live with adversity better than we; no one can beat us in our capacity to cope with hunger, thirst, lack of sleep, or pain. Our solutions are ad hoc, trivial, and transient. We do not believe in learning from our past or that of others. We insist on rediscovering or relearning. So every one of us faces the same crisis, and we always begin afresh from square one. We may begin well, but we pursue hardly anything to its logical conclusion. What a contrast to science, which always builds slowly but surely on accumulated knowledge. Our approach to problem solving is emotional, not intellectual. And our ability to derive satisfaction and happiness from any situation is so remarkable that it leads to complacency. This attitude undermines the desire to forge ahead, which is so basic to the advancement of science.

On the whole, there is lack of conscious, serious, and sustained group effort to change the conditions of life. Such an environment is not conducive to high-quality science and technology, which today require sustained and integrated group effort.

Nevertheless, we believe that curiosity and the desire to find answers to questions about natural phenomena are somehow built into our genes and that this dominating compulsion has led to India's recent progress in science.

HOW SCIENCE DEVELOPED IN INDIA

It was this desire to learn that led to the putting together of our ancient scriptures—the Vedas, the Puranas, the Shastras, and the Upanishads—from the thirteenth century B.C. onward. It was this spirit of inquiry that led to the development of philosophies such as those of Lord Buddha in the fifth and sixth century B.C. It was this thirst for knowledge that led Shankaracharya some ten centuries later to find a new and more progressive philosophy of life. And it was this thirst for knowledge that led to the advances in mathematics, astronomy, medicine, chemistry, and metallurgy in ancient and medieval India that made our country's past so glorious.

The Arabic numerals we use today, including zero, are, in fact, an Indian discovery. They went to Europe through Arab mathematicians. Our ancient astronomers knew how to make calendars, and predict the position of planets and their passage through certain constellations. The nonrustable, nontarnishable iron pillar near Kutub Minar in Delhi is a testimony to the high quality of metallurgical knowledge in India as far back as the fifth century. Drugs such as reserpine for high blood pressure, which have been a part of the ancient Indian system of medicine since ancient times, have been discovered by the West only in this past half century. And our ancestors in the distant past learned by trial and error how to make dyes, sugar, paper, common salt, perfumes, turpentine oil, fireworks, glazed tile and pottery—and to do it all exceedingly well. One cannot but wonder how it all came to happen when one looks at the intricacies of the construction of buildings in our ancient city of Harappa (now in Pakistan) more than 4,500 years ago, or at the drainage systems in other cities of the period. The development of a large number of exquisite handicrafts—many of which are still produced today—is another indication of the desire to learn and to use the knowledge acquired for practical gain. In which other country are the clothing requirements of some 300 million people taken care of by cloth woven on handlooms, with virtually every piece being a work of art?

Yet, the fact is that the number of examples where a systematic attempt was made to find answers to questions pertaining to natural phenomena have been few in our country. We certainly developed technology. Otherwise, we would not have had the iron pillar in Delhi. And we also acquired considerable information in areas such as astronomy so that we could prepare navigational charts and carry out sea trade with countries in Asia and Europe more than 2,000 years ago. But we did so without understanding the basis of the formation of alloys or of extraterrestrial phenomena. Our knowledge was empirical and therefore a dead end. One important rule in scientific endeavor is that factual knowledge without understanding can only take mankind so far and no more, and technology without science can only go so far and no further. We did not develop science—that is, acquire understanding of natural phenomena—because the scientific method did not take root in our country at any time. Therefore, while Europe, much of which was far less developed than our country before Christ, flourished from the fifteenth century onward, we were conquered by one power from outside India after another, and our earlier supremacy in scientific knowledge declined. Barring some notable exceptions, our science remained stagnant, while in the West it progressed by leaps and bounds. By the sixteenth century, the West had already outstripped us.

The spirit of enquiry asserted itself again in the field of science in the twentieth century, with beginnings, in some cases, in the nineteenth century.

The first European-type university in our country was founded in 1818 at Serampore near Calcutta by a group called Danes. It taught only theology and had hardly any influence on higher education. The Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras were established in 1857. For a quarter of a century, no new university was set up and the needs of the entire country were met by these three universities. By the end of the nineteenth century, two more universities were set up: the University of the Punjab (now in Pakistan) and the University of Allahabad.

At the time India gained independence in 1947, we had 16 more universities. As of today, we have 155 universities, which include 107 traditional universities, 22 agricultural universities, 10 institutions of national importance, and 16 professional schools. Out of the 10 institutions of national importance we have 5 Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT), which provide education in technology and science—1 in statistical techniques, 2 in medical sciences, 1 in the Hindi language, and another in oriental studies. We also have 4 Indian Institutes of Management, which provide education in management. Each of the traditional universities has several science departments.

The first medical colleges founded in India were at Madras and Calcutta in 1835. At the time of Independence, we had 28 medical colleges. As of today, we have more than 150 medical colleges.

The Asiatic Society of Calcutta was founded in 1784 by Sir William Jones, a judge of the Supreme Court; the Asiatic Society of Bombay was founded in 1805. The Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science was established in 1876 at Calcutta by Mahendra Lal Sircar, and the Indian Science Congress Association (which holds the annual Indian Science Congress) in 1914. The Tata Institute of Science (known today as the Indian Institute of Science) was founded by the Tata family in Bangalore in 1911, the first research institution in India to be founded and funded by an industrialist. Today it is one of the best-known research institutes in the country.

The only notable scientific discovery made in India by an Indian, which subsequently won the Nobel Prize in physics for 1928—that of the Raman Effect—was made in the laboratories of the Indian Association for Cultivation of Science at Calcutta. Sir C. V. Raman, who made this discovery, subsequently became the director of the

Tata Institute of Science and later founded his own institute, the Raman Research Institute at Bangalore. Both of these research institutions have made outstanding contributions to Indian and world science. (Only one other scientific discovery made in India has won a Nobel Prize: that of the life cycle of the malarial parasite by Sir Ronald Ross, a Briton, at Hyderabad in 1902.)

India has today four national scientific academies—honor societies that elect those who have made outstanding contributions to science as members: the Indian National Science Academy (founded in 1935), the Indian Academy of Sciences (1934), the National Academy of Sciences (1930), and the National Academy of Medical Sciences (1961).

India today has over 50 subject-oriented scientific professional societies. The largest are the Institution of Engineers (founded in 1920) and the Indian Medical Association (founded in 1929). The Indian Mathematical Society is the oldest, having been founded in 1907. Some of the other major societies are the Indian Botanical Society (1921), the Indian Chemical Society (1924), the Society of Biological Chemists (1930), the Indian Physical Society (1934), and the Indian Psychological Society (1935).

There were no agricultural universities in India before Independence and most of the agricultural research was carried out in the laboratories of the Indian Council of Agricultural Research, established in 1929. Govind Ballabh Pant University of Agriculture and Technology is the first agricultural university set up in the country (in 1961). Today many of the states in India, such as the Punjab, Uttar Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, and Tamil Nadu, have agricultural universities.

The oldest engineering school in India is the College of Engineering at Poona, which was established in 1854. Just before Independence, we had 12 engineering colleges. In 1986, the country had 135 colleges of engineering, including the 5 Indian Institutes of Technology.

The development of scientific institutions in India as traced above during the nineteenth and the twentieth century should be viewed in the light of what happened in Europe. The first two professional societies that were founded in Europe were the Royal Society in Britain in 1662 and the French Academy of Sciences in 1666. Both of them have had an uninterrupted history since then. As regards universities, we can think of many in Europe which have had a continuous history and tradition of excellence for over 500 years. For example, the oldest college of Cambridge University—Peterhouse—was founded in 1284. The University of Heidelberg in West Germany was founded in 1386 and has had a continuous and distinguished record since then.

Thus, in Europe there has been a continuity of intellectual tradition on a substantial scale since the thirteenth or fourteenth century, from which period onward science (and then technology) developed at a rapid pace, while the Indian intellectual tradition, which is very much older, went through many interruptions, to the detriment and delay of the development of science.

In the early part of this century, various government institutes and private organizations around the world realized the need for setting up scientific research institutions outside the university system. As science and technology developed, its requirements also changed. Certain crucial facilities required large amounts of money and could therefore be set up only as national facilities; their establishment was most possible under the aegis of autonomous national research institutions.

Need for people who could engage in full-time scientific research work began to be increasingly felt; in a university, one has to fulfill one major obligation—that of teaching. Moreover, the university system was compartmentalized into departments. As science progressed, the need for multidisciplinary approaches increased exponentially. It was found much easier to satisfy this need by setting up institutions designed for it, rather than by trying to adapt the university system to it.

For reasons such as these, governments all over the world began to set up research agencies to complement the work that the universities were doing. India set up the following agencies: the Indian Council of Agricultural Research in 1929, the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research in 1942, the Department of Atomic Energy in 1948, the Indian Council of Medical Research in 1949, the University Grants Commission in 1953, the Defence Research and Development Organisation in 1958, the Department of Electronics in 1970, the Department of Space in 1972, the Department of Science and Technology in 1976, the Department of Environment in 1980, the Department of Ocean Development in 1981, the Department of

Non-Conventional Energy Sources in 1982, and the Department of Biotechnology in 1986.

TOWARDS SELF-RELIANCE AFTER INDEPENDENCE

India has had remarkable growth in science and technology since Independence. No other developing country has shown the commitment to science and technology that India has. In 1958 when Jawaharlal Nehru was our prime minister, our Parliament passed the Scientific Policy Resolution, which states that:

> Science has developed at an ever-increasing pace since the beginning of the century, so that the gap between the advanced and backward countries has widened more and more. It is only by adopting the most vigorous measures and by putting forward our utmost effort into the development of science that we can bridge the gap. It is an inherent obligation of a great country like India, with its traditions of scholarship and original thinking and its great cultural heritage, to participate fully in the march of science, which is probably mankind's greatest enterprise today.

And in 1983, when Indira Gandhi was the prime minister, the Technology Policy Statement was issued by the government to outline a strategy for the technological independence of our country. In fact, in regard to self-reliance, no developing country in the world has done as well in such a short period as India has since Independence. Indeed, there may not be any other country today which would compare with India in terms of self-reliance—and this would include countries of the developed world.

Before 1947, India produced virtually no finished product. We even imported pins, clips, nails, and needles, leave aside paper, crockery and cutlery, finished cloth (made from Indian cotton converted into cloth in Lancashire mills in England), bicycles and radios. Today, India is the only country in the world that makes every item of consumer goods that one buys in the open market. The range and quality of these goods is comparable to what is obtained elsewhere in the world. We are rarely a few years behind in the marketing of new materials and products. The steps that are required for the production or putting together of the final product are not always carried out in India, but in many cases they are. And in every case, at least one step—the final step—is carried out within the country. So today we make cars, refrigerators, radios, television sets, telephones, computers and calculators, heavy machinery, electrical and electronic goods, textiles, watches, locomotives, aircraft, drugs and pharmaceuticals, cosmetics, chemicals, instruments, steel, superalloys and fertilizers—a wide range of items of everyday use as well as highly sophisticated, high-technology items. Whereas in 1947 India exported no finished products at all, today it exports more than 150 different categories of finished products, including some highly sophisticated ones. In some areas of science and technology that did not even exist 30 years ago, such as computer software, India's capabilities are as good as anywhere else in the world.

Today, we have the expertise to do extremely complex jobs within the country with totally indigenous materials and know-how. We can build bridges and steel plants, and set up refineries to process crude mineral oil. It is not surprising that even in the highly competitive international market, Indian firms have won major contracts for sophisticated technological jobs in areas such as transportation and power generation.

However, all this has not happened without our having to fight forces from both inside and outside the country that have been, in reality if not in appearance, opposed to our policy of self-reliance. This opposition has been garbed in names such as privatization, open competition, cost-effectiveness of imported products, and quality, and at times we have fallen for the bait.

ASSESSING THE QUALITY OF INDIA'S SCIENCE

For us to be able to assess properly where we are today in regard to science in relation to the other countries of the world, or in relation to where we were, say, at the time we achieved independence, we ought to remember two things: (a) that we are the second most populous country in the world and, therefore, if we were equal to everybody else, our contribution both qualitatively and quantitatively should also rank similarly; and (b) that our population has doubled since Independence and, therefore, mere doubling of, say, money available for scientific research, or of the number of universities, or of the number of people engaged in research and development activities, since Independence, would not mean progress. As it turns out, in such numbers, we have done phenomenally well since Independence. Today India has the third largest scientific manpower in the world, that is, people with degrees in science, including medicine, engineering, and agriculture. We have more than 2 million trained scientists. Only the United States and the Soviet Union have larger numbers.

One of the criteria for judging the output of scientific research quantitatively is to count the number of research papers that are published in standard, reputable journals. In terms of the number of scientific research papers published per year in about 6,500 journals that are indexed in *Current Contents* (we assume that a journal is included in *Current Contents* only if it is of a certain minimum standard), by the scientists working in the country, our country ranks among the first ten countries in the world. It probably publishes more such research papers than all other countries of the developing world, including China, put together.

To assess quality in scientific research, one can look either at the impact of the scientific work done in the country on world science (that is, one can determine the extent to which we have been leaders and generated new ideas which have been subsequently picked up by other scientists around the world) or at the impact of scientific discoveries on technological advancement (that is, we can determine the extent to which the scientific research done in the country has led to developments that bring material benefit to mankind).

One way of judging the impact of work done by Indian scientists is to note the recognition granted by the community of scientists around the world to Indian scientists. To determine the impact of scientific research work on technological advancement one could look at the new processes and materials developed in the country that have since then been widely used or have led to the country's self-reliance.

To judge the recognition granted to Indian scientists by the international scientific community, one could, for example, look at the number of Indian scientists elected to the prestigious foreign professional academies, such as the Royal Society of Britain, the National Academy of Sciences of the United States, and the All-Union Academy of the Soviet Union. So far, 29 Indians have been elected to the Royal Society; 10 between 1841 and 1947, and 19 after 1947. And several Indian scientists working in India have been elected to the societies named above too. The contributions of the scientists elected have covered a wide range: physics, chemistry, biology, mathematics, and medical science. In the area of astrophysics too, India has produced several scientists of world class since Independence. There is even a comet named after one of them: Vainu Bappu.

To the development of new processes, products, and materials, unfortunately India has made very little original contribution. Few Indian processes, products, or materials that would be considered outcomes of scientific research done in the country are used today outside the country. One exception is the Suri transmission, invented by the late M. M. Suri.

In the final reckoning, therefore, even though our country has a highly elaborate infrastructure for science today—one of the largest scientific and technological work forces in the world, and among the developing countries, the largest industrial output—the country has great need of improvement. India has close to 700 million people. Yet, both qualitatively and quantitatively—no matter what measure or yardstick one uses—the contribution to scientific and technological development of countries that are just 1 percent of the size of India has been greater than that of all of India. No ten countries in the world produce more scientific research papers by scientists working within the country than we do, but in quality we rank much lower than they. We have the dubious honor today of being the most developed of the developing countries but the most underdeveloped of the developed countries.

The world of today lives on materials that were unknown in the last century; many of them were unknown even before the last world war. None of them was discovered in India. Although we are the third largest country in scientific manpower in the world, we can count on our fingertips our world-class scientific research institutions. Their number would not be even 1 percent of the total for the world, even though we have close to 20 percent of the population of the world.

Where have we failed?

First and foremost, in our preoccupation with quantity we have sacrificed quality; that some has remained only shows how deep the roots of the academic tradition have been in the country. Instead of nurturing the seed of excellence and allowing it to grow into a tree, we have let it wither since Independence. In fact, we have not deliberately nurtured excellence, we have done little to contain mediocrity, and we have not even allowed whatever has come about on its own to flower. Mediocrity perpetuates mediocrity just as excellence breeds excellence.

We have not recognized that scientific activity represents a whole spectrum—from teaching in schools in which research is minimal, through factory production, developmental work, and basic research. Most of those engaged in academic pursuit in the country today, including university and college teaching, or research and development, lack the ability, motivation, and drive for success of a high order in scientific research.

We have not recognized that a research operation needs the coming together of a variety of talents: those who can conceive new ideas, have an overview, and can direct research; those who have a high degree of technical competence but need direction and ideas suggested to them; those who are adept in a specified set of techniques and can do repetitive jobs with a high degree of technical competence and reliability; and those who provide service and infrastructure support. We have not developed a culture in which ability is respected no matter what the job is that one is doing. There is a need for excellence in all jobs, from cleaning and typing to every kind of creative activity.

We have been spreading our limited resources too thin. We open a new university and a new research institution at the drop of a hat, without fulfilling the needs of the existing institutions and ascertaining that people of a high level of competence are available to man the new institution. Unfortunately, we have not seen that the internal brain drain within India is at least two orders of magnitude greater than what it is outside the country. It is a sad reflection on our value system that a brain becomes a brain only the day that it decides to settle abroad and ceases to be a brain the moment the person returns to the country with the determination that he is going to work where he belongs.

We are afraid of taking drastic action. Virtually every other country in the world has closed down or changed totally the complexion of research institutions that have not worked. We have not done so with any institution till now, for we lack the courage to be unpleasant.

Our timing is often wrong. We do the right thing far too late. Our support to individuals, institutions, and ideas comes only after we have been left far behind. Instead of pioneers, we remain followers.

We hardly ever take time out to analyze the pros and cons of an issue in depth. Our decision making lacks professionalism and application of the scientific method. Our solutions to problems are often cosmetic and designed to immediately please a few rather than to help many on a long-term basis. Our recruitment and assessment procedures for scientists, and our rules and regulations, continue to be, in most cases, archaic and unsuitable for research and development work.

We are obsessed with the idea that everything that is non-Indian is better, so we buy indigenously *available* technologies for the most trivial of reasons. We give every concession and make all kinds of allowances for everything that comes from outside—be it manpower, material, or processes—but we are supercritical of whatever comes from within the country. This attitude kills indigenous scientific and technological initiative.

We have not understood that basic research is at the core of all research and development activity and that no technologically advanced country in the world has been able to reach that stage without prior investment in basic research.

We have paid only lip service to the development of the scientific temperament in the country even though it is now enshrined in our constitution as one of the duties of a citizen. We have not realized that our concurrent encouragement of scientific research activity and of other activities that have no basis in science, and that are, in fact, antiscience, leads to a dichotomy in which scientific research suffers and irrational and unscientific beliefs, superstitions, religious dogma and obscurantism flourish.

Our commitment has been to the ad hoc and not to professionalism, and our emphasis has been on promise instead of performance. In our obsession with ad hoc solutions that provide political advantage, we have not attempted to determine what problems must be solved first to clear the ground for the solution of the other problems down the problem hierarchy. (In the perception of the authors, the three problems at the top of the hierarchy of problems in our country today are education and its democratization and universalization, water, and energy; and we believe that unless these problems are solved, none of the others, including the control of population, can be solved.) Much worse, for the lack of solution to our basic problems such as food, shelter, clothing, health, education, employment, social justice, and poverty, those who manage our affairs at various levels, as well as the public at large, have laid the blame on science and scientists when, in fact, the scientific components of the solutions have already existed and what has been lacking is socio-politico-economic will. We have thus used science as a scapegoat for our failures elsewhere; we have expected miracles of science that it cannot perform. On the other hand, we have not recognized our successes in science and technology or given credit where it belongs, leave aside consolidating and building on them.

Since the privilege of higher education is by and large hereditary and confined to less than 5 percent of our total population, we have not used nine-tenths of our gene pool, which no doubt harbors much creativity in science. Our scientific and technological manpower of over 2 million comes from a population of no more than 30 million, the rest being outside the mainstream of education. In which other country does one out of every ten to fifteen persons—men as well as women —have a degree in science? Many of these degrees, however, are not truly earned. Since degrees are passports to jobs, including those in science and technology, be they in universities or in research laboratories, mediocrity is sustained. In the estimate of both of us, not more than 5 percent of those who receive their Ph.D.s in science in the country should ever have been registered as graduate students. And if one appoints one second-rate person to begin with, he would pick up two third-rate persons very quickly, and each of them would pick up two fourth-rate persons equally rapidly. This law of exponential decay has been the rule in our scientific institutions. We have not understood that to build schools of excellence, we must begin with first-rate minds who will in course of time, slowly but surely, pick up other first-rate minds, and so on. We have rarely allowed such schools to grow from strength to greater strength.

THE OUTLOOK

Yet, there is no question that there *is* hope and promise. Indian society is vibrant, and such vibrancy is contagious; it is only a matter of time before Indian science will be touched. With a strong base for science and technology that the country has created in the last forty years or so since Independence, coupled with the challenges of the time, the resilience of the Indian mind, and the ambivalence toward both tradition and modernity—which, for once, might turn out to be an asset—the future of Indian science looks bright. It, indeed, will be bright as long as we can use sophisticated computers without forgetting how to do the kind of mental arithmetic the illiterate vegetable vendor does today in India's small city market: he can tell you exactly how much you owe him after you have bought different fractions of a kilogram of several differently priced vegetables—and he can do so for several customers at the same time.

Indian Development: Lessons and Non-Lessons

Amartya Sen

Independence came to India after decades of economic stagnation and followed the disastrous Bengal famine of 1943. The promise of a rapid enhancement of living standards based on planned economic development was articulated eloquently by the national leaders. Now, more than forty years later, India's achievements look decidedly mixed—creditable in some respects (including the elimination of famine and the expansion of higher education) but terrible in others (including widespread morbidity and illiteracy). Comparisons with other countries, such as China, and also contrasts within India, help to bring out the successes and failures, and why they have occurred.

There are many ways of judging the successes and failures of development efforts. An economy can do spectacularly well in one field but quite badly in another. If we look at what has happened to India in the forty years since Independence in 1947, we cannot fail to notice the transformation that has taken place in the economic landscape of India. Whether we examine industrialization, urbanization, the diversity of production, or the variety of technology, the

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Indian economy of 1988 is immensely different from what it was at the time of Independence.[1]

The observation of change is not, however, the same as evaluation of achievement. Indeed, there are some difficult methodological questions in generating an adequate framework for the systematic evaluation of successes and failures of a country's development efforts. One broad issue relates to the question whether to concentrate on the nature of the economy (e.g., the incomes and the outputs, the commodities and the prices), or on the nature of the lives that people have the opportunity to live. It is, of course, possible to have a bit of an argument on this subject, but it is fairly clear that the nature of the economy can have only instrumental importance—as means to valuable ends—and that what ultimately matters is the nature of the lives people can or cannot lead. Wealth and opulence do not indeed give us an adequate basis for judging economic progress (even though a well-established tradition in economics tempts us to stop there rather than examine those things to which wealth and opulence can, at best, be means). As Aristotle noted, "life of money making is one undertaken under compulsion, and wealth is evidently not the good we are seeking; for it is merely useful and for the sake of something else."[2]

This issue may look like a rather remote one. Questions of this kind are sometimes dismissed as being "philosophical," which is not, I fear, meant to be a compliment. In fact, however, these are central questions of practical evaluation, because there is no way of judging actual economic achievement without ascertaining the appropriateness of the criteria used for evaluating that achievement.

This is a question that was, in fact, posed sharply by Jawaharlal Nehru himself right at the beginning of Indian planning. On October 13, 1954, when the relatively modest First Five-Year Plan was in operation and the bolder and more directed Second Five-Year Plan was being formulated in very general terms, Nehru put the problem thus:

> We are starting planning for the 360 million human beings in India. . . . What do the 360 million people want? It is fairly easy to begin making a list—later there may be differences of opinion—but it is obvious enough that they want food; it is obvious enough that they want clothing, that they want shelter, that they want health. They want

> such things, regardless of the social and economic policies we may have in mind. I suggest that the only policy that we should have in mind is that we have to work for the 360 million people; not for a few, not for a group, but for the whole lot, and to bring them up on an equal basis.[3]

It is explicitly in terms of raising the quality of life of the masses that the objectives of planning in India were then seen. In assessing what has or has not been achieved, we must refer to this basic approach to development evaluation. The choice of this focus also has the advantage of raising the question whether the direction of planning has been adequately geared to the ultimate objectives rather than overconcentrating on the means that are supposed to deliver the ends. A crucial issue highlighted by Nehru is the need to concentrate on the ends—the pointer to what the Indian people want "regardless," as he put it, "of the social and economic policies we may have in mind."

There is another preliminary issue that may be worth addressing before getting on with the job of evaluating Indian development experience. Any evaluative judgment has to be, in some sense, comparative. At a very basic level the comparison is between what *has* happened and what *could have* happened. Any criticism of development efforts undertaken must, in some way, relate to the opportunities that were missed and the superior courses of action that were neglected. In a situation that offers no really good options, even the very best action may not have attractive results, but the absence of such results cannot, in a fair evaluation, be regarded as a proper ground for chastising the planners. It is not, of course, easy to determine what could have happened and what feasible alternatives actually existed in the past. But there was no real reason to think that economic opportunities were particularly limited in the newly independent India. Indeed, quite the contrary.

Optimism about what can be achieved was fed, when Indian planning began, by appreciative evaluation both of Keynesian public intervention in the economically advanced market economies (then achieving nearly full employment) and of centralized planning in the Soviet Union (then yielding high overall growth rates). The First Five-Year Plan in India was relatively unambitious and was criticized in contemporary discussion for not aiming high enough. But the Second Five-Year Plan, initiated in the mid-1950s, foresaw the possibility of rapidly transforming the economic basis of life in India.

It followed a blueprint for Indian economic development outlined, on Nehru's invitation, by the distinguished statistician and planner Professor P. C. Mahalanobis—a document that Sukhamoy Chakravarty has recently described as "still probably the single most significant document on Indian planning."[4]

There is, in fact, another aspect of the comparative perspective. The comparison can be with the experiences of *other* countries or with the experience of the same country *earlier on*. The picture may look satisfactory in one respect but disappointing in another. Specifically, the growth rate of the Indian economy measured in terms of expansion of gross national product per head has been a good deal faster than the growth rate in the earlier part of the century before Independence. Stagnant real national income per head, which had been rather stationary—often declining—in the pre-Independence period, gave way to fairly steady expansion in the period of post-Independence planning, with per capita income in real terms rising by about 1 percent or more every year on the average. Seen in this way—in terms of comparison with the past—this is quite a creditable achievement. Indeed, the growth rate of real national product per capita has speeded up somewhat in recent years, making the comparison look more favorable.

On the other hand, in comparison with the faster-growing economies of the developing countries—indeed in comparison with the average of *all* developing countries—this is a relatively moderate rate of enhancement. As the reference points of comparison are changed, the nature of the comparative picture alters radically.

The question is sometimes raised as to whether it ever makes sense to compare one country's performance with that of another. Each country faces problems that are to some extent unique, and the opportunities that are really present in one country may be altogether absent in another. On this view, to make comparisons with other countries is to confuse the assessment.

There is some plausibility in this general methodological point, but there are also similarities between the problems faced by many different countries, and no country is altogether unique. If international comparisons are made with care and caution, they can provide information and illumination. Indeed, even the question what *could have* happened in a country cannot really be sensibly discussed without drawing on lessons learned from experience elsewhere. We can see where we are by examining ourselves in relation to others.

SAVINGS, INCOMES, AND LIVES

The first preliminary question, namely what yardsticks to use to judge success, relates to the second, namely with what to compare. The common criterion of evaluation is, of course, the growth rate of real national income—or of gross national product—per head. As was mentioned earlier, in terms of international comparison, India's relative performance is fairly moderate in the field of increasing income per head. But it is possible to argue that to some extent this yardstick, used in this form, may not do justice to the rationale that prompts the search for such a yardstick since it does not discriminate between the extent to which a country's growth performance has been based on its own economic efforts and the extent to which it has been achieved with substantial foreign help. The extent of foreign aid received by India is often cited as being quite large, and so indeed it is, judged in absolute terms. However, in terms of aid received per head, India gets considerably less than most other countries with which India's performance is compared (in fact, less than every low-income economy other than China and Vietnam, according to the World Bank, as reported in *The World Development Report 1987*).[5] India's international borrowing has also been comparatively small, and it has had no debt crisis of the kind faced by many other developing countries.

Insofar as growth is seen as being related to capital formation, one way of judging the extent of domestic efforts toward economic growth is to look at the proportion of gross domestic product that is saved domestically, that is, what the nation itself ploughs back for the future out of the national output. When development planning began in India in 1951-1952, this ratio of domestic savings to national product was less than 10 percent. By the middle 1980s the figure had risen gradually to 21 percent or more. This is a high ratio judged even in the exacting standards of international comparison.[6]

On the other hand, savings represent attempt rather than success and indicate what is put into the development process rather than what is obtained from it. Along with the increase in the savings rate in the Indian economy, there has been a reduction in the extra output generated per unit of investment, and this reduction over time has certainly moderated the impact that the increased savings rate might have been expected to have on the overall growth rate of the economy.

The issue as to what is important only as *means* and what is important in *itself* is, as was argued earlier, a central question in any evaluative exercise of the kind we are engaged in. The reason the enhancement of the savings rate cannot be counted as successful achievement in itself is, of course, the simple fact that savings and investment are not sought for themselves but only as means to what they can produce. The importance of savings and investment is instrumental rather than intrinsic, and any enhancement of instrumental variables may be washed out, in the tally of final accounting, by a deterioration of the impact of that instrumental variable on things that are intrinsically valuable.

Savings are, thus, rightly seen not as ends but as *means* to enhancing real income and national output. But are income and output themselves intrinsically valuable, or only as means to further ends? This question is worth asking not merely because any evaluator has to address the question what the objectives are. It is particularly important because many critics who have, quite correctly, objected to counting the enhanced savings rate as an achievement in itself have tended to look at the national product or national income as the real standard of progress. But an exactly similar criticism can be made of the concentration on income and output as has been made of focusing on savings. Indeed, wealth and income—to return to Aristotle's language—are ultimately "not the good we are seeking."

Further, the conversion of national income per head to a measure of the quality of life people lead is far from straightforward. First, it depends on how the aggregate income is distributed among different classes, different regions, different occupational groups, different sexes, and so on. Second, even for a *given* person, the conversion of income into the quality of life depends on a number of variable conditions. Because of interpersonal interdependence in health and education, resources used in efficiently run programs of public health measures and public educational systems may produce a great deal more than the same resources used by each individual to provide those services respectively through the market mechanism. Therefore, quite aside from the question of income inequality, there is also the question of efficiency of resources used in generating precisely those things that Nehru had identified as the objectives of economic planning. To assess India's performance in terms only of total product and income, even supplemented by information on the distribution of incomes, would be, thus, a real mistake.

This particular point may at first appear comforting. After all, the Indian growth rate in terms of gross national product per head has been slow, but India does seem to have made considerable progress in enhancing such indicators of quality of life as life expectancy at birth. At the time of Indian independence, the expectation of life of a newborn child in India was not much higher than forty years. By the middle 1980s that figure had risen to around fifty-five or fifty-six years. This is not, of course, an unconsiderable achievement. This may appear to be particularly so if the Indian life expectancy figure is compared with those of other low-income countries in the world. Of the thirty-five low-income countries for which data is provided by *The World Development Report 1987*, only four countries (Sri Lanka, China, Vietnam, and Burma) have higher life expectancy at birth than India. A great many countries in Africa and Asia still have life expectancies firmly below fifty years. Giving credit where it is due, it appears that in the scale of what really matters, India may have a better comparative record than what emerges from looking only at figures of income and opulence.

This comforting picture, however, is deceptive for at least two reasons. First, the cut-off income level per capita used in *The World Development Report 1987* to define "low-income economies" is around $400. Given its comparatively low economic growth, India has stayed on in this group, and therefore the comparison even of life expectancy at birth is made with countries that have not been able to cross that cutoff point of opulence. Countries that have grown a great deal faster have been classified as "middle-income economies" in that report, and in a sense the low growth of the Indian economy is itself one of the factors responsible for making India's performance look better in relation to countries with comparable income per capita. Put another way, if India had grown much faster, it would have been placed in a different category in a classification based on income per head and then its comparative position in terms of life expectancy at birth might not have looked quite so favorable. India's apparent success in terms of life expectancy at birth may, thus, really be a reflection of its comparative failure in terms of expanding per capita income.

Second, even within the class of low-income economies, there are countries such as China and Sri Lanka that have been able to raise life expectancy at birth a great deal higher than India has. Sri Lanka has life expectancies of around seventy years and China close to it — figures not very far from those of rich developed economies of the world—and the figure for Vietnam is sixty-five years (though there is some doubt about the data base used for this estimation). These achievements have been brought about primarily by concentrating directly on improving nutrition and health conditions of the population and by providing a widespread system of medical coverage. Given the clearly identified goals of Indian planning—well articulated by the statement of Nehru quoted earlier—it would have been natural to expect that the focus of Indian planning would go in that direction too and that such efforts could have very positive results.

PUBLIC EFFORT AND SOCIAL ACHIEVEMENT

A comparative study of the experiences of different countries in the world shows quite clearly that countries tend to reap as they sow in the field of investment in health and quality of life. In this respect, India's failure is large not only in terms of results—its moderate achievements—but also in terms of the timidity of the efforts that have been expended in this direction. India's experience may look like an easy success, if it is compared with that of Bhutan, Nepal, Mali, or Burkina Faso, but there is really little reason for comfort in this comparative success.

If we examine the planning documents of such countries as China and Sri Lanka, we find statements similar to those made in India about the commitment to enhance living conditions in general and the health of the population in particular. However, while in these countries massive efforts have in fact been expended for a rapid transformation of the living conditions of the population—in Sri Lanka this took firm roots already in the 1940s, while in China this began after the revolution—in India the efforts have not matched the rhetoric. While India may have added fifteen years to the life expectancy at birth between the late 1940s and 1987, Sri Lanka and China have extended life expectancy to standards much closer to those of Europe in this period—another ten to fifteen years more than that of India. It is in the contrast between India's well-articulated goals and ill-executed performance in things that really matter that a proper measure of the failure of Indian planning can be found. An incidental aspect of it is, of course, the gap between rhetoric and reality in Indian planning.

If we shift our attention from longevity to other features of living conditions in India, we find a similar picture of modest achievement and limited effort. The illiteracy of the population was one of the subjects on which eloquent speeches denouncing the British imperial rule in India were consistently made before Independence, and it is not hard to see why this basic feature of quality of life would have so captured the imagination of the nationalist movement in India struggling against the Raj. To insert an element of personal memory, I remember that as a schoolboy in pre-Independence India I had joined the adult critics in denouncing in no uncertain terms the unambitious nature of the plan for literacy that was being outlined by the British civil servants then in charge. A famous plan devised by the then education secretary Mr. Sargent proposed moving India to full literacy over a long period of forty years. This looked to us absurdly slow at the time, and the possibility of rapid spread of elementary education in India was powerfully expressed by our leaders.

Forty years have now gone by since Independence, and the literacy rate in India is still astonishingly low. The proportion of the population of age five and over has reached only 41 percent, according to the last census in 1981. That proportion for the female population is an incredible 28 percent—with nearly three-quarters of Indian women living totally without the ability to read and write. In retrospect, therefore, even the timid plan of Sargent's looks positively revolutionary! The contrast with such countries as Sri Lanka, China, and Vietnam (with literacy rates between 70 and 90 percent) looks quite remarkable. The low priority that literacy has received in Indian planning is indeed in sharp contrast to the stated objectives and persistent rhetoric of Indian planning.[7]

MEANS ENHANCEMENT AND MEANS USE

The modest nature of India's achievement in life expectancy and literacy can be supplemented by examining other features of India's experience—for example, the persistence of endemic undernourishment for a substantial section of the population, shocking morbidity rates (especially in the rural areas), and high frequency of homelessness (especially in urban India). By shifting attention from things that may be thought to be valuable in *themselves* (in particular, various aspects of the quality of life), we have not been able to make the Indian experience look any more successful.

At this stage of analysis, it may be useful to move away from the examination of achievement to a critical analysis of what may have gone wrong with Indian planning. When we are dealing with an experience in which the growth of real income per head has been slow and the enhancement of the quality of life has also been modest, it is possible to consider two different lines of criticism. One focuses on India's inability to have expanded its means sufficiently fast (this we might call its "means-enhancing failure"), and the other focuses on India's inability to make good use of the means available for enhancing living conditions (what we might call its "means-using failure").

A great deal of the professional criticism of Indian planning has tended to concentrate on the means-enhancing failure. Many arguments have been made to the effect that India's economic performance might have been better in terms of expanding real income and opulence had a different set of economic policies been followed. A variety of hypotheses have been presented in this general line, criticizing: (1) the concentration on import substitution rather than export promotion, (2) the apparent commitment to industrialization with relative neglect of agriculture, and (3) the tendency to use state control instead of providing economic incentives. These critiques undoubtedly have some substance. Even the lack of effectiveness of the increased savings rate in enhancing economic growth correspondingly can be, to some extent, seen as a reflection of efficiency failures and productivity problems related to the nature of Indian planning.

This is not the occasion to try a full-scale assessment of these critiques. I believe it is possible to argue that some of the particular points made do carry less force than has been seen in them. Export promotion has been a great success in countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore, and also in South Korea (though that country has also continued powerful state control and rigorous import restriction, as some presidential candidates in the United States—Gephardt in particular—have pointed out with passion and fury). But it is hard to imagine a country of the size of India finding its way to opulence primarily through similar patterns of export expansion in a world market that is quite limited in size (and the limits of which are further enhanced by trade restrictive policies in many parts of the world). Also, the diagnosis of overemphasis on industry is not an easy thesis to establish. While the performance of Indian agriculture has not been spectacular, despite some achievement (particularly in the production of wheat—the main focus of the "green revolution" in India), its importance has been recognized for a long time. There have been policy failures, but there are also barriers that cannot be surmounted easily, despite the popularity, among some critics, of various magic formulas such as "getting prices right."[8] The truth in this criticism is more complex than some of the simplistic slogans for reform would lead us to believe.

Nevertheless, the efficiency problems of the Indian economy are indeed real, and some of the criticisms made can certainly be listened to with profit. They have been listened to a fair amount in recent years. The criticisms—rather than falling on deaf ears—seem to have encountered ears red with excitement. Since ears are not always the best means of action (and hands have moved slowly), the changes have not been very dramatic. But a few reforms in fact have been introduced in the nature of Indian planning, and other changes are apparently being considered. There is a danger that some of the more solid achievements of the past may be neglected in overattention to problems of one kind only. In terms of transforming the productive base of the Indian economy and the economic landscape of India, the planning experience of India from the 1950s through the 1980s has had considerable achievement. The positive lessons from this can be ignored only at some real cost. Further, reforms and changes needed in other spheres of Indian planning—particularly in the use of public provision of education and health care—may escape attention because of the biased nature of the dominant critiques of the day, which have pushed other issues too far back.

It is possible to discuss these questions from different points of view, and a fuller understanding of the opportunities and challenges faced by Indian planning now has to be based on more comprehensive assessments of the different strategies of means enhancement and means use, and their interdependence. In general, the issue of means enhancement has attracted a great deal of the attention of planners and the policymakers in India in recent years, and it cannot be said that the problem of means enhancement is being neglected in policy-oriented discussion inside the government or outside it.

The picture is, however, quite different when it comes to means-using failures. There is a surprising amount of tolerance of low performance precisely in those areas, vital to the living standard, that had grabbed the imagination of the nation at the time of Independence and that, in the ultimate analysis, give significance to planning efforts in transforming the quality of life of the masses. There is, in fact, remarkable complacency about India's moderate record in removing escapable morbidity, avoidable mortality, and astonishingly low literacy rates.

The point is often made that mere literacy should not be identified with education. What this overlooks is the denial of freedom that is involved in the incarceration that illiteracy represents, the removal of which has been part of the fiery rhetoric from the beginning of Indian planning. Similarly, complacency about the moderate life expectancy at birth in India, particularly in contrast with countries like Sri Lanka or China, which are not much richer in terms of income per head, is also quite remarkable. This is especially so since the failure to improve health conditions in Indian society can be directly related to the relatively low emphasis put on the expansion of public health programs in the planning of India's progress (except in a few regions—most notably in the state of Kerala).

COMPARISON WITH SRI LANKA

Comparisons with Sri Lanka and China of the kind I have been making are sometimes challenged on the alleged ground that the achievements of these countries may not have been due to the public distribution and delivery of food and health care undertaken in these countries. In particular, it has been claimed that there may not have been much enhancement of life expectancy and quality of life in Sri Lanka *linked* with public distribution and social welfare efforts undertaken in that country, and that the high performance of Sri Lanka does not show the effectiveness of these policies. For example, in a well-known study by S. Bhalla that has been enormously influential and widely quoted, it is shown that if we look at the post-1960 experience of Sri Lanka, the enhancement of the indicators of quality of life, including life expectancy at birth, has been rather moderate.[9] Sri Lanka is not an "exceptional" performer in this comparative scale.

There are many technical problems with Bhalla's analysis,[10] but the biggest issue is the simple one of the choice of the time period. The decades following 1960 are the wrong period to look at to assess Sri Lanka's experience with expanding social welfare and public distribution and their impact on life expectancy and the quality of life. Public distribution of some free rice for all was introduced in Sri Lanka as early as 1942, and the great breakthrough in medical intervention and public health was carried out in the mid-1940s. The death rate per thousand in Sri Lanka, which was 20.6 in 1940, fell to 12.6 by 1950 and to 8.6 by 1960. By the time Bhalla's comparison of Sri Lanka with other countries begins, Sri Lanka's death rate was within hitting distance of that achieved in many European countries. It is, therefore, not surprising that *further* enhancement of life expectancy in Sri Lanka beyond 1960 was moderate in comparison with that in many other countries.

Also, social welfare expenditure did not continue to expand very fast beyond the period of 1960, and in the decade of the 1970s, the proportionate share of social welfare expenditure in the gross national product of Sri Lanka *fell* rather than rose. If the thesis is that we reap in the public quality of life as we sow in public effort, then that view is supported rather than contradicted by the rapid enhancement of the quality of life in Sri Lanka during the 1940s and the 1950s, and its comparative sluggishness in the period of Bhalla's study.[11]

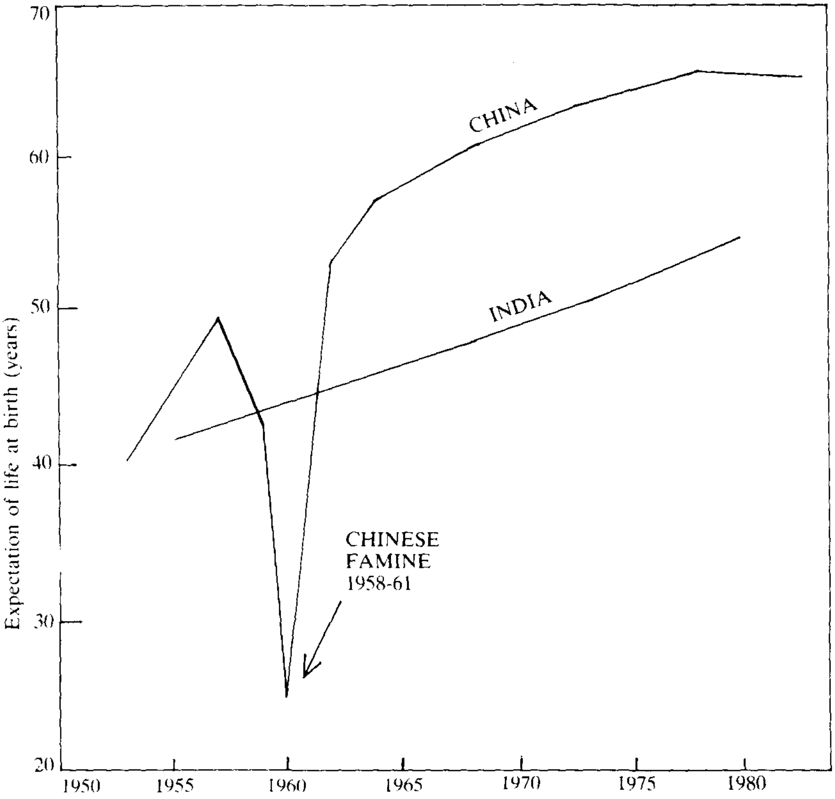
Indeed, being careful about the time periods is an extremely important part of doing demographic social analysis. Just as a point of reference, I might mention that if we look at the expansion of life expectancy at birth in England and Wales during the first six decades of this century, we find that in each decade the life expectancy at birth went up by a figure of between one and four years, with two exceptions of much more rapid increase. Life expectancy at birth rose by nearly seven years in the decade between 1911 and 1921, and also between 1941 and 1951.[12] These were, of course, the decades of the great wars, but—combined with the war efforts—these were also years of public intervention introduced in a large way in the distribution of food and health care (including the birth of the National Health Service during the 1940s), and expansion of public employment. The fact that mortality declined very much faster in these decades—despite the disruption of the wars—is an indication of the effectiveness of public support of food, health care, and employment. Again, one sees here how public effort has directly translated into public achievement, but this is a picture that would be altogether missed if the analysis were careless about distinctions between dissimilar time periods (in particular, failed to note that some time periods have rapid expansion of public distribution while others don't).

COMPARISON WITH CHINA

In the contrast between India and China in terms of life expectancy movements, there are several interesting features. In the chart on page 383, I have presented the two profiles of life expectancy from the 1940s to the early 1980s.[13] There are three rather interesting aspects of the Chinese record in comparison with India's. First, the trend rate of enhancement of life expectancy has been much faster in China than in India, as the two profiles bring out clearly enough. Second, while India's progress has been fairly steady (though slower), China had a sharp fall in life expectancy with a big jump in mortality during the period 1958-1961. At one stage, life expectancy fell in China to the middle twenties. This was during the Chinese famine that followed the failure of the Great Leap Forward, and I have discussed the phenomenon elsewhere.[14] The extra mortality from the famine has been estimated to be nearly 30 million.[15] There has been no famine in India since Independence, despite occasional shortages and some periods of drastic decline in food output (including, most recently, in 1987). The third feature to comment on is the slowdown—indeed turndown—of the progress of life expectancy in China in the period since the economic and social reforms beginning in 1979.

In the field of famine prevention, the contrast between India and China may have at least as much to do with politics as with economics. A big difference is made, I believe, by the pluralist nature of the Indian polity—particularly the presence of active opposition parties eager to criticize the government for disasters and the operation of an alert news-distribution system, which provides early warning of developing famine conditions and makes it hard to hide

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH IN CHINA AND INDIA



Reprinted from Amartya Sen, *Hunger and Entitlements: Research for Action* (Helsinki: World Institute for Economics Research, United Nations University, 1987), 26.

Data sources: J. Banister, "An Analysis of Recent Data on the Population of China," *Population and Development Review* 10 (1984); S. Preston and F.N. Mari Bhat, "New Evidence on Fertility and Mortality Trends in India," *Population and Development Review* 10 (1984), for 1966–1981 based on "the low variant" procedure; *Statistical Pocket Book of India 1984* (New Delhi, 1985), for 1955 (as the 1951–1961 decade average).

government inaction. No government in India—whether at the state level or at the center—can get away with ignoring threats of starvation and famine and failing to take counteracting measures. The contrast with China in this respect is quite striking. Its gigantic famine in 1958-1961 raged on for three years with little change in basic policy and with hardly any official recognition of even the existence of a disaster (one that killed, as stated earlier, perhaps 30 million people). There is some evidence that the Chinese central government had difficulty getting all the facts from the fields (particularly about the extent of the failure of the Great Leap Forward) and much evidence that it was under no powerful opposition pressure to change its policies (criticisms came many years later, after a change in leadership). The docility of the Chinese press contrasts sharply with the active role the Indian newspapers play in reporting early cases of starvation and providing both information and pressure on the governments at the state level and at the center.[16] The last famine in India of any magnitude was the Bengal famine of 1943, in which some 3 million people died. This was, of course, before Independence, and while food output has often fallen quite dramatically in post-Independence India, counteracting measures have been taken fast enough to recreate lost entitlements (mainly through employment schemes, often paying cash wages) to avoid open starvation and famine (even though there has often been intensification of endemic undernourishment in these years).[17]

While India scores better than China in preventing famine, China has had a much faster trend in the expansion of life expectancy and much greater success in cutting down normal mortality and morbidity. When there is no political crisis or administrative confusion, the life of the average Chinese has tended to be much more secure than that of the average Indian. In fact, it is interesting to note that had China's lower mortality rates prevailed in India there would have been about 3.8 million fewer deaths in India a year around the middle 1980s. That indicates that every eight years or so more people in addition die in India—in comparison with Chinese mortality rates — than the total number that died in the gigantic Chinese famine (even though it was the biggest famine in the world in this century).

The protection that newspapers and opposition parties offer against famines in India does not apply, it appears, to quiet and disciplined hunger and deprivation that kills slowly, without producing "newsworthy" stories and without moving opposition parties to eloquent fury. Given the nature of the Indian polity, perhaps the solution to India's problems will have to be sought through the reorientation of politics and news coverage as a prelude to forcing the hands of the government in power—making endemic hunger embarrassing in the same way as starvation is for the ruling governments. Whether or when this will happen seems very far from clear.

In China, where the driving force has come from inside the state and the party rather than from the opposition or from independent newspapers, the basic commitment of the political leadership—not unrelated to Marxist ideology—to eradicate hunger and deprivation has certainly proved to be a major asset in eliminating systematic penury, even though it was not able to prevent the big famine, when a confused and dogmatic political leadership was unable to cope with a failure they did not expect and could not explain. The advantages and disadvantages of the different forms of political arrangements and commitments in China and India provide rich material for social comparison and contrast.

PUBLIC DISTRIBUTION AND MARKET RELIANCE

The third most interesting feature in the Chinese profile of life expectancy is the dip in life expectancy in recent years.[18] It appears that the economic reforms of the 1970s, which have produced remarkable increases in agricultural output (including food output), have been accompanied by considerable increases in death rates. While the gross value of agricultural output doubled between 1979 and 1986, the death rate firmly rose after 1979, and by 1983 reached a peak of being 14 percent higher than in 1979 (in rural areas, the increase was even sharper: 20 percent). The death rates have come down somewhat since then, but they still remain higher than before the reforms were launched in 1979.[19]

The fact that the Chinese death rate had already become very low by 1979 has to be borne in mind in assessing this later information, and it is a matter of some significance that the Chinese had been able to cut down their death rate and raise their life expectancy so radically *before* the economic reforms, when their GNP per head was still quite low and the food output per head not a great deal higher than at the time of the revolution.[20] The means-using success of China in the pre-reform period deserves recognition of a kind that it often does not any longer get, given the praise—well deserved in its context—that has been showered on the production increases since the reforms of 1979. The prereform achievement of China was based on excellent means use despite only moderate success in means enhancement. Since the reforms, the position seems to be almost the opposite, with great success in means enhancement (including doubling of agricultural output in less than a decade) but some slippage in means use, reflected particularly in an increased mortality rate and lowered life expectancy at birth.

The increased mortality rates in China since the reforms of 1979 seem to be associated with several distinct changes. There has been a crisis in health financing partly connected with the decline of communal agriculture, which used to meet a good part of the cost of rural health services and which provided medical insurance for the workers. There has been a substantial contraction, particularly of innovative communal health services, which had played a major part in the Chinese health transformation through the 1970s. Female children seem to have largely borne the brunt of this decline. This tendency has been reinforced by the policy of the "one-child family" and other programs of compulsory birth control also introduced with the reforms. While neither an overall contraction of communal health services, nor the one-child policy are in themselves antifemale, nevertheless, given the promale bias in the Chinese society, their effects seem to have included rather severe neglect of female children. It is also possible that a decline in old-age security arrangements after the reforms has strengthened "boy preference" in China.[21]

In recent years India and China have both moved a little more in the direction of reliance on the market mechanism. For China, which had a great deal of state activity and collectivism in agricultural production, the move toward the market mechanism in that sphere seems to have brought in good results as far as output is concerned. In India agricultural production was less geared to state involvement anyway, and there has not been any radical change in any direction.

On the other hand, in the pre-reform period the Chinese had clearly reaped great benefit in reducing normal mortality and morbidity levels through public distribution and delivery of health and food. India had tried much less in that direction and correspondingly had achieved much less as well. The Chinese have now withdrawn quite a bit from their public delivery system—at least in terms of some of its more radical features—and the results do not seem to be as yet particularly encouraging, in fact quite the contrary. The relevance for Indian planning of the success of Chinese activism in public distribution of health, food, and education still remains great because of the past successes of China in these fields. In fact, the withdrawal has been only in comparison with a very extended system of public delivery in the pre-reform period (direct delivery is still much more extensive in China than in India), and the limited withdrawal has not produced much positive result, at least not yet (with Chinese mortality rates—much lower than India's—being firmly higher every year since the reform than before it). The case for taking a leaf from China's book on public distribution—appropriately adapted to the India conditions—still remains strong.

LESSONS AND NON-LESSONS

The main lesson of Indian planning is that we reap as we sow, and in particular we do not reap what we do not sow. In terms of the ultimate objectives of planning (including raising the quality of life of the population as a whole), India's successes have been in areas that have received direct attention (such as eliminating famines, expanding the coverage of higher education, and widening the use of modern technology), and the failures have been in fields that have not received priority (such as eliminating endemic undernourishment, eradicating illiteracy, and spreading public health).

Insofar as enhancement of living conditions has been attempted directly through public action (as it has been in shielding the population from famine through public work programs and public distribution, in situations of drought or flood or other failures), there has been much success. Indian success in this field is particularly noteworthy in view of the fact that this elimination of famine has been achieved despite India's food availability per head being no higher than that in sub-Saharan Africa, which is plagued by recurrent famine.[22] India's record also compares well with China's in this field, in view of the gigantic Chinese famine of 1958-1961, discussed earlier.

India's success in this respect is at least as much political as economic. Much of the credit for the promptness of famine prevention in India should go to its relatively free and active news-distribution system, which informs as well as forces the hands of the government, and to its plural politics with opposition parties ready to chastise the government for failure to deal rapidly with threatening famines. The contrast both with China at the time of its famines, and with sub-Saharan Africa, is quite sharp and significant.

The low priority given in India to public action aimed at eliminating endemic undernourishment, spreading public health care, and banishing illiteracy is clearly reflected in the low achievement in these fields. The last census in 1981 revealed that only about a quarter of Indian women (above the age of five years) were literate and that in several Indian states (Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh) the proportion of female literacy was still well below 20 percent. There seems to be little pressure generated by the opposition parties or the newspapers against these astonishing failures, and those whose job it is to criticize (and inform) seem to be unduly concerned only with preventing the more visible failures (such as starvation and famine), ignoring the presence of quiet inequities.

The Chinese and Sri Lankan success in spreading literacy, expanding longevity, and reducing morbidity and endemic diseases have not been based on a much higher gross national product per head than India's. Even within India, Kerala has been able to provide many of these services on a regular basis despite being one of the poorer Indian states, and it has been well rewarded for its public efforts to enhance the quality of life. Kerala has a long history of extensive public support in education, health care, and food distribution (covering the rural areas as well as the towns), and its achievements are quite remarkable even in comparison with China. It is estimated that by 1981 the life expectancy at birth in Kerala was 63.5 years for males and 67.6 years for females (the more recent figures are higher than these), compared with Banister's estimates of life expectancy in China in 1984 of 64.9 years for men and 64.1 years for women (the latter substantially lower than in Kerala).[23] Even at low income levels, public action can be remarkably effective, at relatively little cost, in promoting the basic objectives of planning (enhancing the capability of the people to lead a decent life free of premature mortality, escapable morbidity, and debilitating illiteracy).

Recent criticisms of Indian planning strategies have concentrated on increasing outputs and incomes. They have raised some important questions but have often failed to note the main shortcoming of Indian planning, to wit, not aiming adequately at the ultimate objectives of planning. The logistic issues in income creation do, of course, deserve attention (though these issues are typically far more complex than they are often made out to be), but the main reasons for the failure of Indian planning to raise the quality of life lie elsewhere. Overconcentration on problems of means enhancement—neglecting the ends of planning—does not help to achieve those ends.

The goals of India's efforts for economic development were eloquently articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru right when economic planning began in India. If these goals have remained largely unfulfilled, it is because of the extraordinary neglect of these goals in choosing the directions of planning and public policy. In the limited areas in which the goals have received priority (for example, in famine prevention), there have indeed been successes, but outside these areas the ends of development seem to have been comprehensively neglected.

There is no mystery in explaining these failures. Nor indeed in seeing the kind of public effort that is needed and the nature of political activities that can generate the necessary pressure to build the process of political commitment. It has been said that the British empire was created in a fit of absentmindedness. It is unlikely that a prosperous, happy, and just India can be built that way.

ENDNOTES

[1] There are a number of recent studies of the Indian economy, society, and politics. See Pranab Bardhan, *The Political Economy of Development in India* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Isher Judge Ahluwalia, *Industrial Growth in India: Stagnation Since the Mid-Sixties* (Oxford and New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1985); Dilip K. Basu and Richard Sisson, eds., *Social and Economic Development in India: A Reassessment* (New Delhi, London, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1986); Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning: The Indian Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, and New Delhi and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987); Lloyd I. Rudolph and Suzanne Hoeber Rudolph, *In Pursuit of Lakshmi: The Political Economy of the Indian State* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1987); T. N. Srinivasan and Pranab Bardhan, eds., *Rural Poverty in South Asia* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, and New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). See also the somewhat earlier but still useful studies by Robert Cassen, *India: Population, Economy and Society* (London: Macmillan, 1978); Pramit Chaudhuri, ed., *The Indian Economy: Poverty and Development* (London: Granada, 1978); Prem Shankar Jha, *India: The Political Economy of Stagflation* (Bombay: Oxford University Press, 1980), among others.

[2] Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics*, I.5; in the English translation by David Ross, in *The World's Classics*, Aristotle, *The Nichomachean Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 7.

[3] Reproduced in S. Gopal, *Jawaharlal Nehru: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 212–13.

[4] Sukhamoy Chakravarty, *Development Planning*, 3.

[5] In 1985, India received $1.90 in official development assistance per head, whereas China received $0.90, Vietnam $1.80, and all low-income economies other than China and India an average of $16.20. In South Asia, the per capita amount received by Pakistan was $7.80, by Bangladesh $11.80, and by Sri Lanka $30.70. Elsewhere, the amounts received were typically higher, as the average figure indicates—some remarkably more. See *World Development Report 1987* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), Table 22.

[6] India's 21 percent savings rate is lower than that of China (34 percent) but higher than that of every other low-income economy for which the World Bank gives comparative data (e.g., 13 percent for Sri Lanka, 6 percent for Bangladesh, 5 percent for Pakistan, and 6 percent for the average of all low-income economies other than India and China). Indeed the average of the richer countries is not really higher than India's ratio. For all "industrial market economies," the average is 21 percent. See *World Development Report 1987*, Table 5.

[7] For an earlier critique, see my "Aspects of Indian Education," text of Lal Bahadur Shastri Memorial Lecture, 1970, partially reprinted in P. Chaudhuri, ed., *Aspects of Indian Economic Development* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1972).

[8] The success of the Chinese agricultural movement expansion since its move to greater reliance on markets (on which more presently) is often cited as an argument for a change in the same direction in Indian agriculture. What is overlooked here is that with the reforms and the new "responsibility" system, Chinese agriculture has moved *closer* to the organizational pattern of Indian agriculture, which has never had much collectivism.

[9] S. Bhalla, "Is Sri Lanka an Exception: A Comparative Study of Living Standards," in T. N. Srinivasan and Pranab Bardhan, eds., *Rural Poverty in South Asia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987). See also S. Bhalla and P. Glewwe, "Growth and Equity in Developing Countries: A Reinterpretation of Sri Lanka's Experience," *World Bank Economic Review* 1 (1986).

[10] See Graham Pyatt and Paul Isenman, "Comment on 'Growth and Equity in Developing Countries: A Reinterpretation of the Sri Lankan Experience,' " *World Bank Economic Review* 1 (1987), and the response by Bhalla and Glewwe. See also the exchange between Bhalla and this author in Srinivasan and Bardhan, *Rural Poverty in South Asia*. See also the definitive analysis of this issue by Sudir Anand and Ravi Kanbur, "Public Policy and Basic Needs Provision: Intervention and Achievement in Sri Lanka," working paper, World Institute for Development Economics Research, forthcoming in Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, *The Political Economy of Hunger*, to be published by Clarendon Press, Oxford.

[11] On this see my *Hunger and Entitlement: Research for Action* (Helsinki: WIDER, 1987), and "Food and Freedom," text of the Third Sir John Crawford Memorial Lecture at the World Bank, 1987, forthcoming in *World Development*.

[12] See my *Hunger and Entitlement*, 29–30. Also see J. M. Winter's illuminating study of Britain's experience during the First World War, *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan, 1986).

[13] See my *Hunger and Entitlement*, 26.

[14] "How is India Doing?" *New York Review of Books*, 21 (Christmas, 1982); reprinted in Basu and Sisson, eds., *Social and Economic Development in India: A Reassessment*; and "Development: Which Way Now?" *Economic Journal*, 93 (1983); reprinted in *Resources, Values and Development* (Oxford: Blackwell, and Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984).

[15] See B. Ashton et. al., "Famine in China, 1958–61," *Population and Development Review* 10 (1984).

[16] See my "Development: Which Way Now?" and also N. Ram, "An Independent Press and Anti-Hunger Strategies—The Indian Experience," WIDER working paper; forthcoming in Jean Drèze and Amartya Sen, eds., *The Political Economy of Hunger*, to be published by Oxford University Press.

[17] See my "Food, Economics and Entitlements," *Lloyds Book Review* 160 (April 1986); Jean Drèze, "Famine Prevention in India," WIDER working paper; forthcoming in Drèze and Sen, *The Political Economy of Hunger*. On the elementary aspects of entitlement analysis, see my *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlements and Deprivation* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[18] The Chinese life expectancy data used in the chart come from Judith Banister, "An Analysis of Recent Data on the Population of China," *Population and Development Review* 10 (1984), covering up to 1982. For later mortality data, see Judith Banister, *China's Changing Population* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1987) and the recent editions of *Statistical Yearbook of China*. See also my "Food and Freedom." In their paper "On the Recent Increase in Death Rates in China" (to be published by the London School of Economics), Athar Hussain and Nicholas Stern have used the available evidence to decompose the increased overall mortality in China (showing inter alia that there *is* an increase even after taking note of the rising average age of the population). According to Judith Banister's estimates, the peak life expectancy that China has reached was in 1978—the year *before* the reform.

[19] See Banister, Table 4.12.

[20] See Carl Riskin, "Feeding China," WIDER working paper, forthcoming in J. Drèze and A. Sen, eds., *The Political Economy of Hunger* (to be published by Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1990), and his *China's Political Economy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987).

[21] Old-age security is indeed one of the main motivations underlying boy preference in many developing countries. It has been argued that another possible source of strengthening of promale bias in postreform China can be a decline in the gainful employment of women outside the home, which was more common in communal agriculture than in the new "responsibility system," which is rather like a return to the more standard form of peasant farming. On this, see N. Aslanbeigui and G. Summerfield, "Impact of the Responsibility System on Women in Rural China: An Application of Sen's Theory of Entitlements," *World Development* 17 (March) (1989): 343.

[22] On this see my "Africa and India: What Do We Have To Learn From Each Other?" in Kenneth J. Arrow, ed., *The Balance between Industry and Agriculture*

in Economic Development, Basic Issues, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1988). The paper also discusses the extent of antifemale bias in well-being and survival in India—a field in which Africa's record is much superior to India's. If the same female-male ratio obtained in the population in India as it does in Africa, then—given the number of men in India—there would have been nearly 30 million more women in India than in the last census. The number of "missing women" (correspondingly estimated, with African "sex-ratio") in China would be 38 million. An antifemale bias in the division of necessities and health care has been an old problem in India (and in China), and that problem is still unconquered (see my *Resources, Values and Development*, Essays 15, 16, and 20).

[23] Kerala's life expectancy figures relate in fact to 1976–1980 and are taken from *Sample Registration Survey Based Abridged Life Tables 1976–1980*, Census of India 1981, Occasional Paper 1 (New Delhi: Office of the Registrar General of India, 1985). Banister's figures are from Table 4.12 of her *China's Changing Population*. Also, the adult female literacy rate in Kerala in 1981 was, according to the Census of India, 71 percent—considerably higher than China's overall figure of 56 percent for 1985 (see UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 1988* [New York: UNICEF, 1988]). There are of course regions within China that compare very well with Kerala.